

A is for Alphabet by urdearestmom

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Summary: Each chapter is a letter of the alphabet, lots of fluff and laughs ensue!

1. Chapter 1

A is for Al

November 2000, Indianapolis, IN

"MIKE!"

Mike Wheeler was still in bed. He was accustomed to being on his own time since he worked from home. He was a novelist. Eleven Wheeler, on the other hand, was always running on a very organized schedule since she needed to be at the office and visiting foster homes quite often. She was a social worker for the Indiana state government. The fact that her husband was still in bed at this time of day (10:23 AM) irked her. How did he manage to take care of their hyperactive son when she wasn't home?

She stormed into the hall and towards their bedroom.

"Michael Wheeler! Get your ass out of bed right now or so help me God I will drag you to the kitchen!"

There was an audible groan from under the covers.

"Five more minutes, El, please," came the muffled voice.

"Up! Now! This is an important day and I need your help! I cannot believe you're still in bed!"

A messy mop of dark hair appeared, followed by Mike's bleary face. He glared at her.

"It's morning! And I was up late last night. Nobody's gonna be here until like 3. Why do you need me now?"

She glared right back.

"You being up late last night is your own fault, idiot. Things take time! If you're not going to help me set up then at least watch Henry while I do! I left him in his highchair but he'll start screaming to get out any second now."

As if on cue, their son started screaming from the kitchen. El walked back out into the hallway and headed in the direction of the cries.

"The cake needs to be picked up at 1, please take him with you when you go," she pleaded.

Mike forced himself out of bed to the bathroom. He really hated mornings. Sometimes El was so much like his mom that it was scary.

Well, they do say that boys marry their mothers, he thought.

Today was Henry's first birthday. He was a very energetic child, always causing chaos. Even though he was a bit of a trouble-making baby, his parents loved him all the more for it. Karen had been so excited when they announced the pregnancy that she had spilled half of the apple juice she had been pouring. Her first grandchild! Nancy was grateful to her brother for that, because it distracted Karen from the fact that her oldest daughter had been engaged for about two years and didn't seem to have plans for a wedding any time soon.

When El had gone into labour last year, Mike hadn't even been home. He had been at the small grocery store on the next block shopping for Eggos, which were still her favourite food, and cheese because she wanted lasagna. Although his pasta-cooking skills were very sharp, El still preferred Dustin's lasagna. Mike would always try, though. She had called his cell in a panic and he ran out of the store with Eggo boxes in his arms (he forgot to pay for them, but the owner knew him well enough to know that Mike would eventually come back to settle it once he realized his mistake). It would make for quite a funny birthday story when Henry was older.

On this day, many people were coming to celebrate. Karen, Ted, Joyce, and Hopper were driving up from Hawkins. Will was actually *in* Indianapolis at an art exposition, so he would be coming too. Lucas, Dustin, and Max couldn't make it and neither could Nancy and Jonathan, but they would all be returning to Hawkins for Thanksgiving at the end of the month and would see each other soon anyway. They hadn't invited any of El's co-workers because five extra people was already a lot of extra people for Mike and El's tiny apartment.

Mike made his way into the kitchen, where he found El attempting to feed Henry the last of his breakfast (which he very clearly was not interested in eating). The baby was violently squirming in his high chair in a vain attempt to escape the spoon. Mike took it and nudged El towards her own breakfast.

"I'll feed him the rest, you need to eat," he said.

"Thanks, Mike." she sighed.

Once Henry was fed (he yielded to the spoon from his father), Mike took him out of the chair to bathe and dress while El cleared up the kitchen. Henry was a baby that liked water very much. Once you put him in the bathtub, it was almost impossible to get him out before the water went cold. This day was no different, and Mike decided to let his son have some fun. The cake didn't need to be picked up for another two hours, anyway.

About fifteen minutes into Henry's bath (the water was starting to cool), Mike noticed something unusual. Henry appeared to be eating something. But what...?

The soap! Mike remembered putting it on the tub ledge about forty minutes earlier. It was no longer there. He scrambled to the tub to get the soap out of Henry's mouth, but slipped on the rug and fell in face first. Mike came up gasping to the sound of giggles. His hair was plastered to his face and he spotted the remnants of the bar of soap sitting in the water, where it must have fallen off the ledge. So if he hadn't been eating the soap, what did Henry have in his mouth? Mike frowned and pried open the baby's mouth. There was nothing in there, but he was holding a small white rag in his hand.

"EL! I'VE BEEN TRICKED! HOODWINKED, I TELL YOU!"

"*WHAT? I can't hear you!*"

"Come here!"

Mike heard her coming down the hall.

"What did you- what happened to you? Why are you all wet? It was supposed to be him taking a bath, not you!" she said as she gestured

towards the still-giggling and smiling Henry in the tub.

Mike glared at her playfully.

"This kid! I thought he was eating the soap so I ran over to the tub and it turns out it was just that rag. He tricked me! On the way over I tripped on the rug and I fell halfway in, that's why I'm wet." he explained.

El shook her head, smiling at her boys and their antics.

"You let a one-year-old trick you, Mike? Really? What kind of adult are you?"

"Hey! I know you think I'm adorable, okay, don't start denying it after nearly seven years of marriage!"

"Yeah, yeah, wastoid. Clean him up and get him dressed, alright? I need to finish in the kitchen."

Mike attempted to flip his wet hair away from his face so he could see her better (needless to say, he failed).

"Yeah, I'll finish off with this little joker!" he said as he turned back to Henry.

El was already halfway back to the kitchen when she heard her name being called.

"What do you want now?" she asked as she walked back into the bathroom.

"Al!" Mike was looking at their son with an expression of dawning understanding on his face.

"Do you mean mommy? El?" he asked.

Henry pointed at his mother in the doorway and repeated himself. "Al!"

Mike turned back to El with a huge smile.

"I think that's his first word, El!"

"Al!"

"Well he isn't saying it right, but I think it is! I have to document this!"

She ran to their bedroom to grab the Polaroid camera off the dresser. When she returned, she snapped a quick photo of her husband and son in the small bathroom, the former with sopping hair and the latter pointing at her, both with huge smiles on their faces. She would label it as: *Nov 4, 2000. Henry + Mike, bathroom. Henry's first word "Al".*

"Al!"

This was life, and life was precious.

2. Chapter 2

B is for Beautiful

November 1984, Hawkins, IN

"Dude, did you see Christina Mullins?"

"Yeah, what about her?"

"Damn, she is so cute!"

"Sure, but it's not like she's ever gonna like you, Dustin. You're Toothless Henderson, remember?"

"She's new!"

"So? I'm pretty sure Tammy and the posse have already gotten to her."

Dustin's shoulders sagged. "I guess. Why do you always have to be such a pessimist, Lucas?"

Lucas shrugged. "I'm not a pessimist, I'm a realist. And if I'm not, then who is?"

Neither of them mentioned the fact that Dustin had no real interest in Christina Mullins. They both knew who it was that Dustin really liked, and the problem was that Lucas liked her too. They avoided talking about it.

Will reached them just then, where they were waiting by their bikes.

"Hey, guys. Where's Mike?"

Neither of them had time to answer before someone else interrupted, arriving last at the bike stands.

"His bike's not here, he probably left already so he can go see El," she said, out of breath due to running from her locker on the other side of the school. "I saw him at his locker, he was rushing," she added.

Dustin chuckled. "Yeah, that makes sense. Good call, Max."

Lucas turned around and started to unlock his bike. "I guess we should get home then, guys," he said. "Since Mikey's off with his *girlfriend*."

"I'm pretty sure he hasn't asked her out yet. Mike doesn't have the balls to do it," said Dustin.

Will pulled his bike out of the stand as Max prepared her skateboard. "Well we didn't think he'd ever have the balls to kiss a girl but he did, didn't he?"

Max nodded. "He told me he's asking her to the Snow Ball, too."

"Why'd he tell you and not us?"

"I don't know, Dustin, did you miss the fact that I'm a girl and maybe he wanted some female advice?" she retorted.

"Geez, woman, you don't have to be so defensive!"

She slapped his hat off his head in response.

The next Saturday, the gang was at the Wheelers' to hang out all day. Dustin and Will had gone to the video rental store on the corner of Briancliff and Elm, and Mike and Lucas were on their way down from Bradley's Big Buy with some snacks that Karen had sent them to purchase (El would usually have gone with Mike, tagging along on the back of his bike, but she had refused when she realized that the store he was going to was the very same one she had stolen Eggos from the year before). Max and El were in the basement waiting for the boys to get back, while Holly and Karen stayed upstairs laughing at the mishaps of the unfortunate Inspector Gadget.

After one particularly boisterous round of giggles from the mother-daughter pair on the couch, Max turned to El to ask her the burning question that had been with her all morning.

"So has he asked you yet?"

El gave her a confused glance from where she was retacking the

poster for *The Thing* that was constantly falling off the wall.

"Mike, I mean. He said he was gonna ask you to the Snow Ball. Has he done it yet?!"

El smiled a small smile and nodded, looking at her feet.

Max shrieked. She proceeded to redden and clamp her hands over her mouth. "Um, I mean, cool. Um, so, how, exactly, did he do it?"

El walked over to Max and sat next to her on the carpet underneath the staircase. "Monday. Mike came to Hopper's house after three-one-five. I was outside. He said he wants to talk with me, I said okay. Then he said I am the most beeyou-bee-beeyou-"

"Beautiful? El, he called you beautiful? Oh my *god*, that is adorable. Tammy only wishes her boyfriend said that to her!"

"Who is Tammy? Also, what is... boyfriend?"

Max waved her arms excitedly. "I'll tell you after, just finish your story!"

El continued. "He said I am the most bee-youti-full girl he ever met and said if I want to go to the Snow Ball with him. I said yes, but then I said what is bee-youti-full? He got very pink on his face and couldn't talk right. He says it is an extra special kind of pretty."

Max was almost bursting at the seams from the amount of cuteness that had ensued. She may have been a bit of a tomboy, but nothing could stop her from feeling the *feels*. *They have to be the cutest couple in the history of the universe and they're not even a couple yet...*

"Okay, who is Tammy and what is boyfriend, Max?"

Max sighed. She didn't want to have to be the one to explain this, since she wasn't very good at expressing her thoughts and emotions. "Well, Tammy Wilson is this girl at school. She's really popular, which means everybody likes her and she has lots of friends. On the other hand, she's not really very nice to people that she doesn't think are *cool*. And that's us, El. You met Troy?"

"Mouthbreather. Broke his arm."

"Yeah, Dustin told me. He was really enthusiastic about it, hah. So Tammy's like Troy, but instead she's a girl. She doesn't hit people like he does, she uses words to make people feel bad about themselves. And in some ways, it's worse. She also has a group of girls who follow everything she says and are just like her. We call them the posse," Max said.

"Tammy is a mouthbreather?" Max nodded. "Okay. What is boyfriend?"

At this, Max started to blush, the colour showing immediately on her fair skin. In this aspect, she was very like Mike.

"Well, uh, a boyfriend is sort of like a friend. Obviously, a boy. He's just... a boy you like more than a friend."

"Not a friend?" It was beginning to dawn on El that maybe this word *boyfriend* was what Mike had been talking about when he did the thing with his mouth that time in the school last year.

"No, not a friend. More than a friend. It's kind of weird, really, but I guess that's just how people work. He's gotta be someone special to be your boyfriend, and you go on dates and kiss and hold hands and stuff."

"What is date, and kiss?"

Max could have cried. This was getting increasingly harder to explain, and anyhow these explanations were making her think of a certain someone. She wasn't enjoying it, although she supposed El couldn't really ask any of the boys (especially not Mike, he would turn into a stuttering, blushing mess right away), and asking parents was out of the question. She took a deep breath before starting again.

"A date is when you go out and do fun stuff with someone you like," she began, "someone you like more than a friend, and you do it alone. A kiss is when you put your mouth on someone else's to show them you like them. It's like a hug or holding hands, but it's more important. It's only for people who you like as more than a friend. Do

you get it, El?"

El nodded excitedly. She had a name for the thing Mike had done now! Did this mean that he liked her... as more than his friend? She would have to ask him. But for now, she had one more question for Max.

"Max, do you like someone more than a friend?"

Max was suddenly scared. El couldn't know, could she? Because if she did, then maybe *he* did, too. El was very good at picking up on people's emotions, and while he wasn't as perceptive as her, Dustin still usually knew what to say and when to say it.

"Um, why do you ask?"

El suddenly looked much more curious. "You do. Is it one of our boys?"

"I- yeah..." Max admitted.

"Not Mike." Max thought this was funny. Was El showing her first signs of jealousy? They were all fairly sure that El liked Mike just as much as he liked her, even if neither of them realized it.

"Why not Mike?" she teased.

"I don't like it." *Of course you don't, you don't want anyone between you...*

"Well, no, it's not Mike."

El gave her a once-over and said "It is Dustin. Yes?"

Max looked away, red-faced. "You can't tell him, okay? It's a secret."

"Why?"

"He's not supposed to know! It's embarrassing."

"Why? He says nobody likes him, but he has friends. I do not think it is what he means. He means that nobody likes him as more than a

friend, yes? But you do. He will be happy if you tell him."

Max sighed.

"No, he won't, El. Dustin doesn't like girls like me. He likes girls like Christina Mullins. She's pretty as hell, and she's smart too. Plus, she's popular, like Tammy. It means she has a lot of friends," she added as she noticed El's questioning expression. "I'm just plain old Max, I'm not pretty, I'm not very smart, and I'm not cool either. I'm basically one of the guys, and that's probably all he sees me as. I'm not going to put myself in that situation."

"Okay, Max. Can I read to you?"

"Hey, Max!"

It was the end of last period (which for Max was English) and all she wanted was to escape. She didn't want to go home until she knew Billy would be there, but he had work today and wouldn't be back until late. Max might have headed over to Mike's house, since that was where the gang usually hung out and Mrs. Wheeler didn't mind having her son's friends over, but they had been forbidden this week because Mike was sick with the flu (El was too, and there were suspicions as to how she had gotten it...). In short, Max couldn't think of anywhere to go, so she might as well stay behind to talk to whoever was calling her and kill some time.

It was Christina Mullins.

Oh for God's sake, why me?

"Yeah?" Max headed towards the door as Christina drew closer, adjusting her blue dress.

She better not ask me if Dustin's going to the Snow Ball, Max thought darkly.

"You know your friend Mike? Is he going to the Snow Ball?"

MIKE! HAH! Oh, how unlucky you are, Christina!

"Why do you ask?"

Christina fidgeted with her dress nervously. "I just- I think he's cute, that's all. Do you know if he's going?"

"He is, but if you wanted to go with him you're too late. He has a date already."

Christina looked at her shoes disappointedly. "Oh. Do you know who?"

"A friend of ours. She's homeschooled."

"Oh. Well, thanks anyway, Max. Could you tell him I said hi? I noticed he hasn't been at school this week."

She must like him! This is hilarious, wait till El finds out!

"Will do." She started in the direction of her locker, but she had only taken all of three steps away when Christina asked another question.

"What about Dustin? He's pretty funny," she said.

Max whipped around. "You're not even friends with us. You hang out with Tammy and her group, and you know perfectly well that she hates us. I don't know what you think you're playing at, Christina. And as far as I know, Dustin's not going." With that, she stalked off down the hall, leaving one Christina Mullins shocked at the earful she had received.

Max was fuming. *How dare she? She doesn't have any right! She doesn't even know them, why would she want to go to the Ball with them? Goddamn prissies, all they want is a date.* She slammed open her locker and began to throw what she needed into her bag. When she was done, she slapped her locker shut again. On the other side was Dustin.

She jumped nearly a foot. "Dustin!"

"Hey! So it's just us today, Lucas said his mom asked him to be home as fast as possible, I think his grandparents are visiting or something. Will said he had a doctor's appointment right after school and had to get going," he said.

"Oh. Cool." She paused. "Hey, could I come to your house? If you don't mind. I don't want go home yet. We could do some homework together, maybe?"

Dustin nodded excitedly. "Sure! Algebra?"

Max smiled. "Or science, because I need a little help with that."

As they walked out of Hawkins Middle, the mid-November sun hitting their faces, Max felt a little nervous but mostly happy at the prospect of spending a few hours alone with Dustin. This was sure to be an interesting experience. Once she had gotten her skateboard and he his bike, they pushed out onto Elm and headed in the direction of Kerley Street. When she reached the intersection at Cornwallis and Kerley, right in front of Dustin's house, she turned around to see how far behind he was. Turns out, he had stopped at the other end of the block for no apparent reason, but when she looked at him he began to pedal towards her.

When he arrived, she looked askance at him. "Why'd you stop?"

He smiled. *Goddamn, his smile is so cute!*

"Well, if I hadn't stopped I wouldn't have been able to appreciate the beauty that is you. Your hair really reflects the light, you know? It's like fire," he responded.

"So you're saying my hair is on fire."

"No, I'm saying that I really like your hair. Also that I think you're really cute."

Max was speechless.

"Shall we get inside and do some homework, then? After you, milady," he said as he gestured towards the front door.

Later, just as Dustin's mother left for the supermarket, they finished their science homework and started taking their algebra out.

"Do we really have to do algebra? I don't want to," groaned Max, hanging upside down off the side of Dustin's bed.

Dustin, sitting at his desk, said "I guess we don't have to, since he said it's not due tomorrow. And algebra's a bitch, anyway. But what do you wanna do, then? Unless you wanna go home now, I can go with you if you want?"

Max looked at her watch. "It's still early, Billy won't be home till late. Do you think your parents would mind if I stayed for dinner? I really, really don't want to go home," she answered.

Dustin sighed and plopped himself down on the bed next to her. "Nah, they won't mind. My mom likes you, Dad doesn't really care unless you're rude at the table or some shit. But shouldn't you go home? I mean, you can't avoid your mom forever."

"She's a raging alcoholic, Dustin, she doesn't care about her kids. She's always mad at us when we're home, but she can't hurt us when we're not. That's why Billy's always at work, he wants to get enough money so that when he graduates he can get us both out of here and away from her. And it's why I'm always hanging out at Mike's, 'cause Mrs. Wheeler actually cares about the kids in her house, even if they're not hers. My mom cares so much the only reason she'd put up missing posters for me is to take suspicion off of her. I could run away and she wouldn't care, dude. She'd be glad to be rid of me."

During this rare show of emotions, Dustin had started to play with her hair. It was a habit to play with his own when he was thinking hard about something, except this time it was Max's because he liked her hair better and he was feeling courageous. She found it to be quite soothing.

"Shit, Max, I didn't know it was that bad, I'm sorry. If you ever need someplace to go, you can come here, I've got you covered. And if you ever need someone to talk to, I like to think I'm a good listener," he joked.

She rolled her eyes. "Thanks, Dustin. You're a good friend, you know?"

"Is that... *all* I am to you?"

Max suddenly felt panicked. Was he asking what she thought he was

asking? *How was she supposed to respond to this?*

"What do you mean?"

He shrugged.

"I mean... when I called you cute earlier, you didn't say anything. I thought you were gonna hit me, or at least yell at me for being a shithead. So I guess I thought... maybe... you might like me?"

She glared at him. *How does he know?*

"What made you think that?"

Dustin looked away. "I don't know, I guess it's just me looking too much into things. I'm a hopeful guy, okay? Because I really like you, and I hoped you might like me too. Guess not, huh?" He smiled sadly.

Max could not believe it.

"You-" she sat up, "you like me? *Me? Really?*"

He looked back at her. "What do you mean, *really?* Of course I do, you're great!"

She almost laughed. "Well you were right, dumbass! You almost always are, aren't you?"

He started to smile a real smile; her face was already stretched to its maximum.

"Dustin, do you want to go to the Snow Ball with me?"

"Of course, pretty lady. I would be honoured!"

She pushed him off the bed, both of them laughing.

3. Chapter 3

C is for Catastrophe

November 1985, Hawkins, IN

Mike had decided that today was the day. *Frankly*, he told himself, *I can't live like this anymore*. It was time to tell El how he felt about her and ask her on a date.

"Michael! Get up now or you'll be late for school!"

"Coming, Mom!"

When Mike arrived in the kitchen, Holly was finishing up the last of her breakfast. She smiled at him with syrup dripping off her chin.

"Good morning, Mikey!"

"Uh, Hol, I think you might have a little something here," he said, gesturing to his own chin.

She swiped at it and looked closely at her hand, then licked the syrup off, giggling. "Thanks, Mikey!"

She's so cute, thought Mike. While he waited for his waffles to be finished in the toaster, he poured himself a glass of milk and started to drink it. Holly washed her hands and hopped off her stool, then pushed it back into its corner. She proceeded with her daily morning routine, which included asking her brother a question every day.

"When is Ellie gonna be your princess?"

What she meant by this was "When will you stop being a chicken and ask her out?", but of course six-year-old Holly didn't have those words in her vocabulary, so she settled for a sentence that encompassed her own understanding of the situation. She had watched and rewatched Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty many times, and whenever she saw Mike and El together it reminded her of those movies. Thus, the only logical conclusion was that El must be Mike's princess and he her prince. Somehow, Holly knew

that El wasn't Mike's princess just yet. She wanted to know when it would happen, because she wanted it to be now.

Mike choked on his milk, spraying it all over his shirt and face. He was not expecting that question out of his little sister. Usually her questions were something along the lines of "Why does the TV only work when we turn it on?"

"Um, why do you ask, Hol?"

"Because I want it to be now!"

"Well, it might be today, you know. I was planning it," he whispered.

"Yay! Mommy! Ellie is gonna be Mikey's princess today!"

"What?" said Karen, coming up the stairs from the basement with a laundry basket.

Mike was leaning over the toaster to see if his waffles were nearly done (it was actually to avoid the embarrassment of his mother finding out he was going to ask a girl on a date) when she entered the kitchen and Holly repeated herself.

"Ellie is gonna be Mikey's princess today!"

Karen looked at her son. "Michael? What's Holly talking about?"

"She's just- OW!" His waffles had popped out of the toaster and smacked him, and since Mike was so fair-skinned they left a faint burn mark on his cheek, right under his eye. This day was really getting off to a great start!

"She's just excited because I told her I might ask El on a date today," he muttered, rubbing his face.

Karen smiled. "Well, I wish you luck with that. I'm sure she'll say yes, that girl likes you like no other."

He avoided looking at her, choosing to focus on the clock instead. "Thanks, Mom. Oh shi- shoot! I'm gonna be late! Bye guys!" He ran out the door, grabbing his backpack on the way. Both Mike and El

had study hall in first period (which was when he was planning to ask her), but he still had to make it to homeroom for attendance before the bell rang.

He grabbed his bike and started pedalling before he was even fully on it, using one hand to shove half an Eggo in his mouth. Just as he turned the corner onto Kiney Street, he realized he had forgotten his lunch at home, and with this distraction lost balance and swerved into Mrs. Phillips' rosebushes. This was very unfortunate, because now Mike had been stabbed multiple times by thorns, his hair was messy, and since it had rained the night before his pants were covered in mud. But he persevered. He was going to school today, whether the universe wanted him to or not.

On his way, Mike kept getting stopped at red lights, making him later than ever. When he stopped at the light on Elm, a truck passed in the opposite direction that drove through a mud puddle and completely drenched him. *Great! Just great! I'm gonna be late, burned, covered in mud, AND I forgot my lunch!* Today was not a good day. Perhaps these were omens, and maybe he should wait until another day to ask El on a date. Even so, he still had to go to school. Mike was not one to miss class without good reason.

When he reached the intersection of Brianciff and Elm, right across from the middle school (which meant he still had a little ways to go, since the high school was behind it), the sky opened and so began a torrential downpour.

"ARE YOU KIDDING ME?!" he yelled at the clouds. To any bystanders, this may have looked very strange, but Mike was incensed. Within seconds, he was soaked to the bone. *At least this'll wash most of the mud off...* he thought darkly.

After he had locked his bike into the bikestand out front, Mike stalked into the school and straight to the office.

The secretary took one look at him and his quietly enraged features and immediately took out the register of students.

"What can I help you with today?" she asked.

"Michael Wheeler. I'm late."

"I see." She noted his lateness next to his name in the register. "Thank you, Mr. Wheeler. You can go to your first period now, homeroom is over."

"Thanks."

At his locker, he fumbled with his textbooks, trying to avoid his hair dripping on them. Once he was done, he headed off to the library, his hangout spot with El during study hall. When he got there, she was sitting with her back turned, in the bay window she usually sat in. As he approached, he could hear his shoes squelching on the linoleum floor. He looked like an absolute catastrophe.

"Hey."

"I was wondering where you were," she said, turning to face him. Her eyes widened as she took in his bedraggled appearance. "What happened to you?"

"Long story," he grumbled.

"Tell me anyway."

So he told her the long and sad story of his horrible morning, by the end of which she was laughing.

"It's not funny, El!"

"Yes it is! You just don't think so because it happened to you!"

"Ha ha, I'm crying tears of laughter, can you see them?" he asked sardonically.

"Yes, actually, I can," she retorted.

He shook his head. "I had a question for you, El. Partially why I'm so mad that I was late."

She could sense the seriousness that was needed to answer his question, so she quieted her laughter. "What is it?"

Mike took a deep breath. "I'm probably extremely obvious, but I really like you, El. As in, more than friends. Since we met. It's why I kissed you that time, and why I asked you to the Snow Ball. I guess I was wondering if- if you wanted to go on a date with me sometime?"

She stared at him for a few moments, processing what he had said. His expression was getting increasingly nervous as the time passed.

El smiled and kissed him on the cheek, making him turn bright pink.

"I'd love to."

4. Chapter 4

D is for Dastardly

April 1986, Hawkins, IN

He was ready, and he was going to take advantage. Today was his day.

April Fools! An evil cackle began in his head.

The night before, he had waited until his parents were in bed to tape an airhorn to the wall behind their bathroom door. When his mom went into the bathroom in the morning, she would open the door and the knob would hit the horn.

"DUSTIN!"

He laughed madly.

"April Fools, Mom!"

On Friday, Dustin had gone to the supermarket and bought onions. He had also bought some caramel. Then he spent Monday night making caramelized onions. He was going to bring them to school to share with Lucas, because Will unfortunately was absent due to a dentist's appointment, and Mike and El had a different lunchtime. Dustin had another, better, prank planned for Max.

As he and Lucas finished their lunches, Dustin took out his caramelized onions and offered one to his friend.

"My mom made some caramel apples, you want one?"

Lucas looked at him skeptically. "You're offering me food? You never share, what's up with that?"

Dustin had his lies prepared. "My mom made them purposely for me to share with you guys. She'll kill me if she finds out I ate them all," he said.

Lucas snorted. "That's never stopped you before." But he took the onion Dustin was holding anyway.

Dustin was already smiling hugely before Lucas even took a bite, but when he did the laughter exploded out of him.

"DUSTIN! That's disgusting!"

"April Fools, man! You fell for it!" He was crying tears of laughter. Lucas threw the bitten onion at him and it bounced off his hat.

"You suck."

That same Friday, Dustin also bought a pack of Oreos and two tubes of Colgate. Back when she first returned to Hawkins, Mike had introduced Eleven to Oreos. They quickly became her favourite snack, even surpassing Eggos. They were also Mike's favourite snack, had been since he was a very young child, and wherever there was food, Mike, and El involved, there were Oreos and they were shared between the two.

Thus, Dustin had devised the perfect prank. He had removed the crème filling from each cookie (and eaten it, because who would pass up such an opportunity?) and refilled them with the toothpaste, then put a bag of them in El's locker. She would see them when she went to get her lunch. He knew El's locker combination because he had helped her learn to open the lock at the beginning of the year. It was convenient information, because Dustin didn't know Mike's combination and El was also less likely to question the Oreos. She'd think it was Mike that had left them for her.

Even more conveniently, Dustin had study hall during the period that coincided with the couple's lunchtime, and they had decided to eat in the courtyard today because of the good weather. There would most likely be few or no other people in the vicinity. This meant that he would be able to witness them be fooled by his masterful pranking skills.

He got to the hallway that led to the courtyard before they did, but he could see them coming and needed to hide quickly. He ducked into the restroom just in time. Dustin gave them a few minutes to

commence eating before he went outside and began to walk towards them.

"Hey, guys," he said, casually strolling past. "Just heading to the library. Have a good lunch!" This was not an irregular occurrence, and so did not incite any suspicion in either Mike or El. They waved hello and continued their conversation.

Meanwhile, Dustin hid around the corner of the wall separating the courtyard from the path that led to the library shared by the middle and high school students. He waited about five minutes as his victims finished their sandwiches, after which he heard the crinkle of the plastic bag he had left the Oreos in. He inched forward slowly until he could just barely see them sitting at their table.

"Hey, you want an Oreo?" said El. At this, Dustin started to smile deviously.

"Sure!" He had to bite his lip to keep from making a sound.

"Thanks for these, by the way," she added, lifting the cookie to her mouth.

"What?" said Mike, taking a bite.

The pair made the same face simultaneously, akin to Jack Nicholson's iconic expression in *The Shining*, but more disgusted.

"Is this *toothpaste*?" yelled El. "Why would you do that?" She threw the bag of cookies at her boyfriend.

Mike raised his arms to defend himself. "I didn't, I swear!"

"Well if it wasn't you then who was it?" she retorted.

He thought for a moment. "El, what day is it today?"

"Tuesday?"

Mike shook his head, realization having already hit him.

"I mean the number."

"April 1st. Oh wait, it's April Fools!"

Mike stood from the table, heading for Dustin's lookout point.

"DUSTIN!"

Dustin took off running towards the library.

Three weeks previous, Dustin had had an idea for the ultimate prank to be played on Max. It was to be his best prank yet, besides the one with the goat he had played on Will last year. He went down to the junkyard in the hopes of finding a skateboard. His luck held out and he found just what he was looking for. Dustin took it home and refurbished it, bringing it from scrap material to as close to brand new as he could get it. Then he made it look as much like Max's skateboard as possible. After that, he broke it. The idea was to replace Max's real skateboard with the fake one to make her think that someone had broken hers. This plan would work because Max would be so worked up about the broken skateboard that it wouldn't cross her mind that the only other person who knew her locker combination was Dustin. He was the one friend in the group that knew everyone's combinations without ever having had to ask (everyone's except Mike's that is, but Dustin would get it someday).

So, during his spare period (after he escaped Mike and El in the courtyard, he doubled around back to the front entrance) Dustin went to Max's locker. It wasn't too far from his, which was good because he couldn't carry a skateboard around the whole school without looking suspicious. He opened hers as inconspicuously as possible, gently slipping her skateboard onto the floor. Once he had replaced it with the broken one, Dustin went a little further down the hall to his locker to hide Max's. After that, he made his way to the library to actually do some work (he had three assignments he needed to start).

At the end of the day, Dustin was very excited. He couldn't wait to see Max's reaction! It would take immense effort to not laugh. He practically ran to his locker from last period in order to make it to the hallway before Max. When he got there, she was just coming around the corner in the other direction, so he had to quickly put himself together and make it look like he hadn't just been sprinting

down the hall.

A few minutes later, a shellshocked Max appeared by his side.

"Someone broke my skateboard..." she said. Dustin suddenly felt horrible. He shouldn't have pranked her with her skateboard, it was her baby. She liked it more than she liked him, which was saying a lot. What he didn't know was that Max had taken a very logical approach to the situation. She realized it could only have been Dustin, because he was the only one who knew her locker combination, and that he wouldn't have actually broken her skateboard. She was going to guilt him into admitting it.

Max started to tear up. Surprisingly, she was a very convincing actress. "I can't believe someone would do this! I can't afford a new one!" she cried.

Dustin crumbled. "I'm sorry, sorry, it was me. I didn't actually break it. Here," he added, removing the intact skateboard from his locker.

Max snatched it and hit him with it. "I knew it! That's not funny!"

Dustin held up his hands and started backing away. "It was just a joke! I'm sorry, it's April Fools!" He turned and began sprinting down the hall again, weaving between classmates and upperclassmen.

"DUSTIN!"

When Dustin returned home, he was very disappointed that he had not been able to prank Will. It was really too bad, but he supposed that nothing could ever top the goat prank of April Fools 1985. Now *that* was a prank. His mother was in the kitchen sorting through files for the case she was working on (someone was suing the government under a claim that Benny from Benny's Burgers was murdered by government agents because even though this had happened almost three years previously, the case was only just now making it to court), and she smiled at him when he walked in.

"How was your day, honey?"

"Great! I pranked everyone except Will, but that's okay I guess. I have a whole nother year to plan something even better!"

She nodded as if she knew something he didn't. "That's great. Well, why don't you run along and get started on your homework?"

He removed his backpack. "I actually don't have any, I did my morning stuff during study hall and my afternoon classes didn't give homework today. Can I play on the Atari?"

"Sure!" She smiled a very devious smile, eerily similar to her son's, as soon as he turned his back.

Will had come by earlier in the day and said that he wanted to prank Dustin as revenge for all the pranks he had played and would play on everyone else. Mrs. Henderson readily agreed, wanting payback for the airhorn scare that morning. She didn't know what exactly Will had done, but she knew that it was something to do with Dustin's Atari, which was sure to be hilarious.

Dustin felt like playing Space Invaders on that day, so he took out the cartridge and popped it into the console. However, when he attempted to play it, the TV showed nothing. Was there something wrong with the game? He took it out and blew in it, then put it back in. It still didn't work.

So he tried Mario Bros. That one didn't work either. *Maybe Pac-Man?* Nothing. Dustin's attempts were proving fruitless and his desperation was increasing. *Why isn't the Atari working?! Oh shit, I hope it's not broken!*

He tried almost every other game he owned, blowing on each one and putting it in twice, but every time produced the same result. Finally, nearing the bottom of the box he kept the cartridges in, Dustin came across a folded sheet of paper.

Dear Dustin,

Bet you didn't check the actual Atari, did you? There's a piece of tape in the cartridge slot. Thought I'd give you a little scare as revenge for the goat last year. Not so funny when you're on the receiving end, is it?

Will

"Mom! Will pranked me back!"

She burst out laughing. *"I know! I let him in!"*

Dustin was horrified at the idea that his own mother could betray him in such a manner.

"MOM!"

5. Chapter 5

Hey guys, urdearestmom here! This is chapter E, I hope you guys have been enjoying this story so far! I will probably not be posting a new chapter next week because I begin exams this Friday so this week is all about studying. I may post chapter F on Monday still, or maybe on a different day of the week. Thank you!

E is for Elevate

April 2005, Indianapolis, IN

Henry Wheeler had always been a very curious child, therefore he had been very excited to know what his baby sister would look like. He had never seen a baby before. Would she be as big as him? He had many questions, most of which had gone unanswered because his parents were rushing around so much. Even his father, who was always with him, hadn't really answered anything. It was time to find out for himself.

Vienna Wheeler had been born two days earlier, but today was her first day home. At the moment, Mike was in the kitchen making a sandwich for El while she rested on the sofa in the living room. Vienna was sleeping in their room. By this time of course, they had moved into a small house to accommodate their growing family. Their previous apartment had just barely allowed three people, much less one more, so they had had to upgrade.

Henry had been on the carpet in the living room playing with his Legos when he noticed that his mother was sleeping. *She's very tired*, he thought. He got up and went into the kitchen.

"Daddy, Mommy's sleeping," he said.

Mike turned around to look at his son. "Well, don't make too much noise then, okay buddy?"

"Okay, Daddy."

He was on his way back to the Lego-covered carpet when he decided

to go investigate his parents' bedroom. He hadn't gotten a good look at his sister yet. Once inside, he realized he was too short to see over the side of the crib and that he couldn't see the baby properly through the bars. From what he could see, though, he deduced that babies were small and very pink. She didn't look like other girls that he had seen because she didn't have a lot of hair. It was quite strange. He thought it might be because she was still a very small baby. He had seen photos of himself as a baby and he hadn't had much hair either.

However, this view was not enough to quench his curiosity. He wanted to take her out of the crib so he could touch her and maybe pick her up to see if she was heavy. At the same time, Henry also knew that there was no way he could get her out without one of his parents because he was too small to do it himself. As he stood there trying to come up with a solution to this seemingly unsolvable problem, Vienna started to float above her mattress. When she came to her brother's eye level, he noticed what was happening. It scared him because he didn't understand what it was so he freaked out, and when he did she immediately dropped back onto the bed and began to wail. This scared him even more and he backed himself into the corner between the door and the closet.

Mike came running in first, closely followed by El a few seconds later.

"Why is she crying?"

"I don't know!"

El took Vienna out of the crib and rocked her until she stopped crying, Mike hovering over her shoulder. Only when the baby was back in the crib and they turned around did they see their son sitting in the corner with tears on his face.

"Hey, what's wrong, buddy?" Asked Mike.

El crouched down and wiped Henry's tears off on her shirt.

"What's wrong? Were you scared of the baby?"

He nodded.

"Well, that's okay. She was just crying because she was upset. She must have woken up. I don't know how though," she added.

Henry sniffed. "It was me," he whispered.

His mother's face wrinkled in confusion. "What did you do?"

"She flew. I think I did it, because I was thinking about getting her out of the bed but I didn't know how and then she started flying!"

El looked at Mike, who was looking at her as though he had a question to ask. Mike didn't say anything aloud, but somehow Henry could sense that some kind of communication had passed between his parents.

"Baby, do you think you could do it again? But make something else fly instead of your sister," said El.

Henry shrugged. "I don't know how, Mommy," he said.

"Just think about something in this room flying and see if it works."

He looked around for something suitable, spotting El's phone on her bedside table. He stared at it for a few seconds, thinking about making it fly, and lo and behold it did! Henry was filled with surprise.

"It flew! Mommy, it flew! How did I do that?"

She smiled. "You're like me. Come on, let's go back the living room, we should let Vienna sleep."

Now he was confused. What did she mean?

As soon as he was seated amongst the Legos, Henry turned to his parents for an explanation.

Mike began. "Your mommy isn't like most other people that you meet. Like me, I guess. I'm a regular person, there's really nothing special about me. But your mommy has powers. Like the superheroes

you see on TV, she has powers like them. She can make things fly, or break things without touching them, or even talk to people without actually saying anything. She can do lots of things."

"And you're like me, sweetie. You can make things fly too. Maybe one day you'll be able to do all the things I can do," added El.

"Like Superman?"

His parents laughed. "Yes, like Superman. Sort of," said his mother. "Do you want to see?" She asked.

Henry nodded excitedly. A few seconds later, he was floating near the ceiling fan, and then whizzing around the room like a bird. When he landed, he was smiling hugely. "Can I make people fly too?"

El nodded. "Of course you can. You made Vienna fly, remember?"

"Oh yeah."

Mike snorted. "Freaks out about his flying sister, then proceeds to forget about it completely."

"Hey, don't be mean to him! You're just jealous that he's like me and you don't have powers too," said his wife.

A thought suddenly occurred to Henry. "Mommy, does Vienna have powers too?"

Mike slapped his forehead and laid back on the couch while El snickered at him. "Don't tell me you're all gonna be magical and I'm just gonna have to live with my normal human-ness!"

El chose to ignore her groaning husband and answer her son instead. "We don't know yet, sweetie. But since you do, she might too. We'll have to wait and see."

The boy turned to his father. "It's okay, Daddy, we all still love you even if you can't make things fly!"

"Thanks, buddy. That really helps," responded Mike.

El smacked him. "Stop being such a Debbie Downer! Like he said, we'll all still love you even if you aren't as cool as us."

Mike got up, scowling. "You know what, I don't really like either of you right now! That sandwich I was making is mine now. Goodbye." He exited in the direction of the kitchen.

El shook her head. "He's just joking, baby, don't worry. You can go back to your Legos."

"What about your sandwich, Mommy?"

She smirked. "Just wait." The sandwich came floating through the doorway and once it was close enough El grabbed it and took a big bite, then hid it behind her back.

About thirty seconds later, Mike walked back into the living room. "Did you take the sandwich?"

Neither his wife or his son said anything, they simply stared back at him.

"Fine. Be that way. I see how it is!" He cried dramatically.

It was silent again for all of two seconds before the three burst out laughing.

6. Chapter 6

F is for Friend

November 1984, Hawkins, IN

On Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays El went to the Wheeler house. She went there almost every day of the week, but Wednesdays were special because she spent the whole day there. On the way to the police station in the morning, Hopper would drop her off with Karen and they would go about the day. For Karen it was a great pleasure to take the girl under her wing, and for El it was nice to feel mothered for once in her life. Joyce was very good too, but since she was always at work it was harder to spend time with her.

Holly was a joy to play with. Since El had grown up virtually alone, not even knowing that other children existed until she met the boys, she had missed out on a childhood of fun. Holly was like the childhood El never had, and she was also surprisingly good at explaining games. Since Nancy was so much older and Mike was a boy, Holly didn't really have the experience of a sister to play with, which El made up for.

On this particular Wednesday, El had learned how to wash and dry dishes properly. She also learned where all the dishes belonged in the Wheeler household. She liked to use her abilities to put the dry dishes away, and Karen didn't mind as long as nothing was broken. While Holly watched TV, Karen and El cleared the kitchen from lunch and began to set up El's workspace on the dining room table.

Karen had been a secretary for about three years before she became pregnant with Nancy and left the workplace to raise children. That being said, Karen was always a good English student when she was in school and so the adults had decided that she could help El with learning to improve her reading and writing skills as well as expanding her vocabulary. They discovered that she could read and write, but only very slowly and she didn't know the meaning of most words. But she was a fast learner. Today was a writing day, so together they laid out El's notebook, pencils, and her book and dictionary. She was to read three chapters of her book every day, and

every time she came across a word she didn't know, she would write it in her notebook and then look for a definition in the dictionary.

About an hour into this, Karen walked into the dining room.

"I'm going to Bloomington for shopping and Holly's coming with me. Will you be fine until Mike gets home? He should be here in about an hour and I'll be back later for dinner," she said.

El nodded. "I will read."

And so she did. Approximately another hour afterwards, she heard Mike's bike crunching on the gravel in the driveway and then the basement door slam.

"Come on, Max, I want you to meet her!"

Who is Max? Thought El.

Mike came bounding up the staircase so excitedly that he fell at the top and smacked his face against the floor. El could not keep herself from giggling at the sight, but she stopped once another laugh joined her.

"Really, Mike? Didn't think you were this clumsy," said a voice, and a second later a girl appeared behind Mike.

"Hi, El!" He exclaimed.

El, however, was focused on the girl. She had long hair, orange like a carrot. She also had sprinkles on her face like Mike did, which automatically added to El's sudden dislike of her because they made her pretty.

She is pretty. Why did Mike bring her?

"Earth to El! How was your day?" Asked Mike.

El shrugged. "Okay. I am reading," she said, gesturing to the table.

"Cool! So, I want you to meet someone. This is Max, she's our friend, she came here last year," he responded, motioning to the girl next to

him.

"Hi, El. Nice to finally meet you, this knucklehead talks about you all the time and I was getting tired of it. Whatcha reading?"

El drew her book closer to her. "Peter Pan."

Max's face lit up and El's dislike of her diminished slightly. "That's one of my favourite stories! What part are you at?"

El pointed at her place on the page. "Captain Hook is bad man. He wants to catch Tink," she added.

Max laughed. "Yeah, he is a pretty bad man. Tinkerbell can be really annoying if she wants to be, though. I like John the best. Have you seen the Disney movie?"

El shook her head. "What is Dissnee? And moovee?"

Max looked at her, mouth agape. "What do you mean, what's Disney? How do you not know what Disney is? Or a movie?!"

"Movies are like TV shows, but they're longer. Disney is a company that makes movies for kids. It's named after its creator Walt Disney," said Mike from the kitchen.

A second later he walked into the dining room with two freshly washed apples. "Have an apple, El. There's Eggos in the toaster. Do you want anything, Max?"

She got up. "Yeah, actually. Do you have any milk? Or cookies? Or both, preferably."

He led her into his kitchen, pointing at things on their way in.

"There's cookies on the middle shelf in the cupboard over there next to the oven, cups in the one to the left, and there's milk in the fridge. Help yourself."

As Max turned around to do just that, Mike asked his very important question. "So what do you think of her?"

Max closed the fridge. "Well, she seems nice, but- how does she not know what a movie and Disney are?!"

Mike sighed. "Dude, we've told you this already. She didn't grow up in the best of places, and she doesn't know a lot of things. We have to help her."

"But still, even the most deprived kid knows what a movie is."

The Eggos popped out of the toaster and El appeared immediately, so quickly it was almost as if she'd been at the door beforehand. Mike stared after her as she left the room.

"Okay, weird..." He said.

Max elbowed him while getting cookies out of the package. "Everything about her is weird. You guys still haven't told me exactly what the story is."

"It's complicated, Max, and dangerous."

"So?"

"So we're not gonna tell unless we absolutely have to!"

She rolled her eyes at him, munching on an Oreo. "Yeah, yeah, says you. King of geeks everywhere, what do you know about danger?"

He smiled thinly. "Trust me, I know more than you think."

El was watching this exchange from the dining room. Before getting her Eggos she had been at the door listening, but she had had enough of that. Clearly, this Max girl didn't like her very much. She was a weirdo- as Lucas had dubbed her.

El didn't like Max very much either. She wasn't sure exactly why she felt that way, but she knew that it had something to do with the fact that Mike seemed to be so comfortable talking to another girl. It made her feel funny inside, like she wanted to steal Mike away from Max and put him somewhere that Max would never find him. It was one of the stranger things El had felt in her life.

A week later, on Wednesday again, Mike brought Max home once more. By this time El had finished *Peter Pan* and was onto *The Secret Garden*. When they greeted her she merely waved and did not look up from her dictionary. A few moments later, Mike walked back to where El was with a sticky note in his hand.

"I have to run to the store, my mom went to the park with Holly and she needs me to go get some milk. Is that okay?"

El nodded.

"Okay, I'll be back soon and Max is in the kitchen!" He said, already on his way out.

When Max came in her direction, El pretended that she didn't see anyone. She was not about to talk to this girl. Max pulled out a chair and sat across from her, eating a banana she'd stolen from the kitchen. They sat in an increasingly awkward silence, filled only with the sound of turning pages and chewing. Finally, El couldn't take it any more.

"Why are you here?" She asked.

Max looked at her, surprised that the other girl had spoken. "Mike asked me to come over. He wants us to be friends, I think," she added.

El narrowed her eyes. "Friends?"

Max shrugged. "Yeah, I guess I could use a girl friend. I mean, the boys are great and all but sometimes they're a little much."

"You don't have girls?"

Max interpreted this to mean that she didn't have friends who were girls. "No." She shook her head. "The other kids at school don't like me much. They think I'm weird, especially because I hang out with Dustin, Mike, Lucas, and Will. I was new, so I could have been anyone and made friends with anyone. But I decided to be friends with 'the geek squad'." She said this in air quotes. "Kinda ruined any chance I had of being cool, but then I don't think I was ever going to be in the first place."

El understood a little more now. Max tried to be happy about the friends she had, but she could use another one. Frankly, El agreed. The boys were good friends, but sometimes she needed another girl. Both Joyce and Karen had said so. And since Nancy was no longer around, El was out of options. But...

"You don't like me." It wasn't a question.

Max's eyes widened. "What? When did I say that?"

"Last time. I hear you and Mike in the kitchen."

"Dude, no! I just thought you were a little weird 'cause you didn't talk much and you didn't know what a movie was. Mike's explained stuff to me already, I get it now. I thought maybe we could be friends too, if you want? If you don't that's okay. I know I was a little rude, I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings," she said.

El considered this. What was it that Mike had said 'sorry' meant? It was when you did something bad to someone else and you wanted to make them feel better about it. She guessed she could accept the apology. Max wanted to be friends! This was an exciting prospect.

"Okay. You are my friend now."

Max beamed. "Whatcha reading this time?"

When Mike got home ten minutes later, he saw the two girls sitting happily at the dining room table chatting. It was a surprise because El was a person of few words, except when she was with him. He was glad to see them enjoying themselves.

After Max went home, El went into the living room and poked Mike to turn his attention away from the episode of He-Man he was watching.

"What's up, El?"

She smiled at him. "I made a friend! Max is my friend now," she said.

He smiled back. "That's awesome! You can't be hanging around wastoids like us all the time, and Max is really cool."

She nodded. "She is nice. I like her."

Mike hugged her very quickly, almost as if she was burning him when he got too close. "Do you want to watch He-Man with me?"

7. Chapter 7

Hey guys, urdearestmom is here! So I realize that my updates aren't going to be weekly anymore, I can't write that fast. Also I'm in Portugal on vacation at the moment and will be for approximately another month. Hope you enjoy! In addition, I've had an idea for a whole fic concerning little Henry Wheeler in high school, so if anyone would be interested in reading that please leave a comment below!

G is for Girls

December 2013, Indianapolis, IN

"You just have to believe in yourself and use a little fairy dust!" He exclaimed.

It wasn't his first play ever, and it wouldn't be his last play ever. It was, however, the last play before he went to high school. Yes, Henry Wheeler was in eighth grade, and he was having a good time.

This week was the last week before Christmas break, and the school was holding auditions for the annual spring play. This year it was set to be *Peter Pan*.

Henry was an ambitious fellow, so he tried out for the part of Peter himself. His friend Elora was there in the audience watching him, just as she was at every audition. His parents were great, but Elora was his biggest supporter. Afterwards, they were going to run down to the coffee shop near their school to pick up hot chocolates and celebrate, even though the cast wouldn't be posted until January when they returned to classes.

"You did great! I can't believe how awesome that was!"

He scratched his head. "Really?"

Elora nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, really! I think that was your best audition ever! I'm sure you'll get the part, if they cast anyone else as Peter I'm not watching it in April."

January

Elora saw the list first. She passed by the gym every day on her way to math class, so when she noticed the group of people crowding around something on the gym bulletin, she knew it had to be the cast list. And just as she had thought, at the top of the list was:

Henry Wheeler - Peter Pan

But right under it, much to Elora's displeasure, was:

Angela Finsbury - Wendy

She knew H-man had had his eye on Angela for a while before they left for Christmas, even if he himself didn't really know it yet. He was going to be very happy about this, so Elora was going to have to fake being unaffected until further notice.

Angela was the kind of girl everyone wanted to be friends with. She was pretty, got good grades, and was nice. At least to your face she was. As soon as you turned your back, Angela found something mean to say about you. She'd done it to Elora time and again.

When Elora walked into math and sat next to him, said boy noticed she was disturbed or annoyed by something.

"What's wrong?"

Elora looked at him, startled. "What do you mean? Nothing's wrong."

"Friends don't lie, El. I can see it in your face."

"I said nothing's wrong."

Henry gave her a look. "Alright, have it your way. Tell me when you're ready then."

February

She was mad at him. He knew it, he could *feel* it. And he didn't like it. Elora being mad at him was like the end of the world.

He supposed this had all started when he told her that he liked a girl.

He didn't understand how it could be possible for one person to be so pretty. With her sleek, long, brown hair and her cute round face with the big bright green eyes, she was just... wow. Whenever he walked into class or rehearsal, she was the first person he looked for. When she was absent, it made him sad. When she talked to him, or even just looked at him, he felt so nervous and giddy he thought he might throw up.

Her name was Angela Finsbury, and Mister H. Wheeler was head over heels for her.

Perhaps it had begun a while ago, but Henry had only noticed recently. Angela was so nice, and she was very smart too. What was there not to like? Elora could list many things. She would tell you that Angela was annoying, and wasn't really smart, she just copied off other people. She was also mean behind your back. Henry chose not to believe Elora.

Elora was Henry's best friend, had been since he saved her from falling off the monkey bars in kindergarten by inadvertently using his powers. From then on she thought he was the best thing since sliced bread, and she was the peanut butter to his jelly (except he didn't like jelly). She had only been mad at him once, back in fifth grade when he thought it would be funny to put gum in her hair while she slept (his dad had gotten so mad at that one, but his mom only laughed. Mike said she'd been hanging out with Dustin too much).

Today, she was *extra* mad. She hadn't said hi to him this morning like she always did, and when the teacher called out an in-class project she had partnered up with someone else, forcing Henry to pair with his other deskmate, Joey. Joey was horrifying in all respects (he picked his nose and ate it, scratched his butt and sniffed it, left food scraps and wrappers in his desk, and clearly didn't know how to take a shower).

Henry decided he would talk to her at lunch. He figured it was probably the best time to do it anyway, in case they got into a fight (which would be inconvenient in class).

Turns out, Elora was so angry that there happened to be no best time to talk to her. Lunch only made it worse because she was hungry and wanted zero disruptions. Henry realized this and decided to take his chance anyway.

"Hey, El, why are you mad at me?"

Elora snorted derisively, observing Henry sitting down across from her. "Why am I mad at you? You know perfectly well why."

He sighed. "Is this about Angela again?" Henry said, setting his lunch on the table. "Because seriously dude, I don't get it."

"You don't get it?"

"I don't."

"Then you're dumber than I thought."

"Seriously? You are so annoying when you want to be."

She rolled her eyes. "And you're very stupid when you want to be. I told you that Angela's mean, she talks shit behind your back."

Henry put a forkful of pasta into his mouth angrily. Swallowing, he said "You don't know her! You've never been friends with her! She's so nice!"

Elora was done. "Fine. Don't believe me." She got up and walked out of the cafeteria, discarding her trash on the way out.

March

Today was the day. It had been exactly a month since Elora had last spoken to him.

At first he didn't miss her at all, so caught up in what he believed was justified anger. Henry started to hang out with Angela and her friends more often. They were nice most of the time, except they had really weird ideas about what was cool and what was not.

With Elora anything was cool, really. She knew about the strange

powers he'd inherited from his mom and she thought they were the best thing ever, which he was almost sure Angela and her friends would laugh at if they knew. They might even tell him he was crazy.

That was mostly why he missed her. She accepted him as he was, and while hanging out with Angela was still pretty awesome, Henry missed his best friend and he wanted her back.

This task was, however, near impossible. She wasn't speaking to him, or even looking at him most of the time. He was surprised that she hadn't changed any of her seats in the classes she shared with him.

On this very day, Eleven came to pick Henry and Vienna up from their schools (the elementary and middle schools were next door to each other), the complete opposite of the usual routine of being picked up by dad and not seeing mom until dinnertime. When her children got into the car, she immediately picked up on the fact that something was *really* bothering her eldest.

"Hi, guys! How was your day?" She asked.

Vienna immediately started babbling excitedly about how today her teacher had taught them how to multiply numbers, but Henry simply stared out the window.

"That's very nice, sweetie. You should ask your daddy about that. I know he's a writer, but he was very good at math and science when he was in school."

"Where is he?" Asked Vienna.

"He had to go to the dentist today, sweetie. He'll be home soon, don't worry. Now what about you, Henry? How was your day?"

Henry sighed and let his head slide farther down the window. "Okay, I guess. Angela asked me on a date this Saturday, so that's good, but it's been a month since Elora's talked to me."

El could feel his emotions, and she knew that her son was much more upset than he was letting on.

"As your mom, I'm supposed to give you advice in life, so I'm going to

try my best here, okay?" He nodded. "I know you miss Elora a lot more than you want to admit. It's hard to suddenly be separate from someone you love, I would know. I think you should try to talk to her and make things up. I'm sure she's missing you just as much. As for Angela, do you want to go out with her? We don't have anything planned for Saturday so I can drive you wherever you need to go."

He sighed again. "I don't know, Mom. I've liked Ange for a while now, but if just being friends with her made Elora stop talking to me I don't know what dating her would do. And I'm not sure I want to try that."

His mother shrugged. "Well, it's up to you. Just let me know about Saturday so I know whether I have to take you anywhere."

April

Henry had decided not to go on that date with Angela, and as a result she had stopped talking to him so much as well. Now she mostly just acknowledged his presence and spoke to him at rehearsals. He was a little disappointed, but Henry refused to admit that Elora had been right. That is, until one day during a rehearsal break.

He had gone to the restroom and was gaily making his way down the hall back to the gym, high on his love of acting, when he heard them. Angela's voice was unmistakable after having spent so much time in her presence (once she had him, she kept him by her side almost constantly until he rejected her). She was talking to her friend Cassandra about another girl, but Henry couldn't tell who.

"Ugh, she's so annoying," said Angela.

"I know, right! I can't believe he let her hang around for so long..." added Cassandra.

Henry knew that they hadn't realized he was down the hall and could hear them, and he decided to stay around the corner so that they couldn't see him. He could sense that they were feeling nothing but negative emotions when they talked about this girl so he knew it wasn't going to be anything good that he heard. He stayed simply out of a need to know who they were discussing.

"Seriously, he didn't go out with me because of her!"

That sounds oddly like me they're talking about...

"Oh my god, are you kidding me? What does she have that you don't? You're popular and pretty and everyone loves you, she's just some rando nobody cares about."

"Except Wheeler, apparently," retorted Angela scathingly.

They're talking shit about El! What! Even!

"He's stupid if he thinks she's better than you, good thing you ditched him!"

Angela laughed. "I know! She's probably never kissed a guy anyway, I guess he's not into experienced girls."

Cassandra gasped. "She's never kissed anyone? Oh my god, how lame!"

"Probably not, I mean, have you looked at her? What guy would want to kiss that?"

It was at this moment that Henry decided he'd had enough. Nobody got to shit talk his best friend under any circumstances.

"Actually, she has. And I would, because I did."

Angela and Cassandra pivoted so quickly they almost lost their balance (which Henry would most definitely have laughed at).

"Hen, sweetie! What are you talking about?" Asked Angela.

"Ew, don't call me that, it's disgusting. And you know what I'm talking about, don't play dumb. Unless you really are?" He snapped.

Angela seemed shocked that he had spoken to her this way, and Cassandra was slowly backing down the hallway in the direction of the gym. Henry could sense that they were scared, which wasn't his intention but it was preferable to them being angry (which Angela would probably be in a minute).

"I really don't know what you're talking about..."

"Nobody gets to shit talk Elora like that, she's done nothing to you! She was right about you. I ruined my friendship with her because I thought you were cool. Well guess what, you're not! You're an insecure girl who needs to talk to someone about her problems instead of putting other people down because of them," he said, getting closer to her with every point. Angela was staring at him with eyes so wide it looked like they could almost swallow the rest of her face.

"And not that it matters, but for your information she has a kissed a guy, and that guy was me. El's awesome and you don't get to shit all over her just because she's not up to your stupid standards. Now if you'll excuse me, I gotta tell Mrs. Gomez that I have a friendship to fix."

8. Chapter 8

This one is a little sadder...

H is for Hate

March 1984, Hawkins, IN

"If you're out there, just, please give me a sign."

On a Saturday afternoon about a week before he turned thirteen, Mike Wheeler was sitting in his basement and had been writing the end of the campaign he and his friends would play at his party. He was feeling... numb. He then turned and looked at the blanket fort in the corner, the one his mom had tried to take down in January. She had stopped when he came into the basement and screamed when he saw what she was doing, then started to cry, and she sat with him until his sobs turned to hiccups and those into slow breaths as he fell asleep. Karen didn't know exactly what had happened during that week in November, but she did know that it had changed her children forever, Mike especially. She was aware that he needed time, and she was determined to be as supportive a mother as she could be.

Mike knew he could talk to his mom if he needed to, but he didn't want her to worry about him more than she already did. So he kept it in as much as possible, which was getting relatively easier because he was feeling less and less.

Suddenly, the lights in the basement flickered, and in the fort Mike's Supercomm crackled. He looked at his watch. 3:15.

"El? Is that you?"

His Supercomm continued to crackle, but the lights stopped flickering and shut off completely. Mike tripped over his feet as he rushed over to grab the walkie-talkie.

"Eleven?!" He said into it. No response. "El, please, if it's you..." Mike squeezed his eyes shut.

The lights came back on. "Please let it be you," he whispered. The

Supercomm stopped making noise and the lights flashed blindingly bright once, then everything was back to normal.

"No, no, no, no! NO!" Screamed Mike, tears brimming in his eyes. He threw his Supercomm into the blankets and got up, ripping the top blanket off the table and kicking the rest of them until the fort wasn't a fort anymore, just a pile of blankets under a table in the basement.

"I hate you! I hate you so much! I hate everything!"

Nancy came rushing down the stairs because she'd heard her brother yelling and she was under the impression that there was no one else home with them, so she was confused. When she arrived in the basement she saw Mike standing in front of a pile of blankets with tears streaming down his face.

"Oh God, Mike." She wrapped her arms around him and led him to the sofa. "What's wrong?" He continued to cry, and it broke Nancy's heart to see Mike this upset. Why hadn't he talked to anyone about what was bothering him?

"I hate this!" He sobbed into her shoulder. "I miss her so much Nancy..."

"Hey, that's okay. You're allowed to miss people, and I know she was important to you."

"I hate this, I hate this, I hate this! I hate her and that she even appeared, and I hate me, and I hate existing and I hate the world for taking her away! Sometimes I wish she'd never showed up so I wouldn't feel like this..."

Nancy was beginning to feel as though she hadn't been aware of many things, even after she and Mike promised they wouldn't keep any more secrets from each other. One of those things was the depth of his feelings towards Eleven.

"You lied to me, didn't you?" She asked. Mike looked at his sister confusedly. He was starting to feel calmer. Maybe talking to someone about his feelings really did help. "When I asked if you liked her."

Do you like Eleven?

What? No, ew, gross!

Lies, and he knew it then too. "Yeah, I- I did."

"Mmm."

"I kissed her."

"Called it."

Mike sighed. "This is so unfair, Nance. Why'd all the bad stuff have to happen to her? She deserves people who care about her, not some bastards who think they can use her like she's an object! She only knew us for a week and sacrificed herself to save us, who does that?"

He could feel the tears threatening to escape again. "I just- God, it hurts, and I hate that it hurts because it was only a week so why do I miss her so much?" Mike buried his face in Nancy's shoulder and she hugged him tight.

"It's okay, Mike. People change people and you changed each other. I think she's out there somewhere, and wherever she is I'm sure the thing she wants most is to get back to you."

"Thanks, Nance," said Mike, muffled through his sister's sweater. "I can't believe I just cried on you, when's the last time that happened?"

Nancy rolled her eyes. "Probably when you were like 4 and I hit you, then I had to make it look like I was helping you so I wouldn't get in trouble," she answered. "It's totally fine to cry. Just because you're a boy doesn't mean you don't have emotions, and I think in your case you feel them more strongly. Don't know why though, would be interesting to try to find out," she added.

"That's weird."

She laughed. "You're weird, weirdo. But I love you anyway."

"Love you too, Nance."

9. Chapter 9

Hey guys! I wanted to upload this asap because I'm heading off to Fátima and Lisbon for 2 days so I probably won't have much time to write. Hope you enjoy! Haha, there is a little bit of swearing in this one ;)

I is for Ice Cream

June 1986, Hawkins, IN

"I need some Advil," Mike heard his girlfriend say.

She had a migraine. Sometimes they would just randomly hit out of nowhere and she couldn't figure out why, and this was one of those times. Mike and El had been hanging out in the Wheelers' basement after having gone to the theater to see *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, and they were simply lying on the floor talking about things when she felt a sharp pain in her head.

I need some Advil, she thought.

"Okay, I'll get it," said Mike, getting up and making his way to the stairs, leaving Eleven confused on the floor. She would have asked where he was going but her head was in agony already. When he came back, it was with two capsules of Advil and a glass of water. *What?*

El furrowed her brows as he helped her sit up. "How'd you know I needed Advil?" She asked.

Mike looked askance at her. "What do you mean? You said you needed it." El shook her head.

"No I didn't."

"You didn't?" She swallowed the capsules with a big gulp, then downed the rest of the water.

"Nope. I *thought* it." Mike's eyes widened.

"What do you mean, you thought it?"

"Right before you got up, I thought that I needed some Advil. Then you went and got it. How'd you know?"

"I just.. did? I could've sworn I heard you say that!" He exclaimed.

El thought for a moment, and Mike opened his mouth to speak at the same time.

"I-"

"Do you-"

"Wait, you go first," she said.

"Do you think it's to do with your powers? Like, maybe you put your thought in my mind, somehow?" Asked Mike. El nodded her head.

"That's what I was gonna say. Maybe it's something new Papa never realized I could do," she added. Mike felt itchy at the mention of that vile man.

"Yeah, maybe... do you wanna try again?"

Can you hear me?

"Yeah, I can! Whoa, this is so cool!"

She laughed. "Can you try answering without saying anything?"

Can you hear me still?

Yes! This is so cool, El. Should we tell the guys or keep it a secret?

Hmm, let's keep it a secret for now and play tricks on them!

Good idea! How far do you think it goes?

What do you mean?

Like, how close to each other do we have to be, do you think?

I don't know. We can try again when I go home later. Probably doesn't have a limit, though.

Mike leaned over and gave her a quick kiss, then pulled away smiling. "What was that for?" Asked El, smiling back.

"Just because."

A few days later, the gang was hanging out across the street from the record shop, waiting for Mike to get off work so they could all go do something together. Max and Dustin were busy distracting each other, leaving Lucas, El, and Will to themselves. Mike and El had discovered that there did not, in fact, seem to be a limit on their "bond" as they called it, and El was eager to try it and freak out the boys. Luckily, such an opportunity had just come her way.

It was nearing 4:30, and Mike's shift had ended at 4. Everyone was getting impatient. "What's taking him so long?!" Demanded Lucas.

Lucas wants to know what's taking you so long.

Mike answered immediately. ***I've been trying to escape for half an hour! Keane had me do some extra stuff in the back but now he's on one of his rants and I can't get away! HELP ME!***

El snorted. "He's trapped, his boss had him do extra stuff but now he's ranting and Mike can't escape," she said, in response to Lucas.

Lucas narrowed his eyes at her. "How do you know that?"

El shrugged. "Just do." Will eyed them both, then his gaze skittered over to the record shop.

He's suspicious now, so is Will.

TELL THEM TO GET OFF THEIR ASSES AND HELP ME GET OUT OF HERE!

Okay, calm down! We're coming.

As she got up from the bench they were sitting on she told them just that.

"What?!"

She laughed. "Come on, we'll explain. Let's get him out."

El only had to poke her head into the store for Mr. Keane's attention to be diverted to her, and the expression of relief on her boyfriend's face was evident.

THANK GOD!

"Hi, Mr. Keane!" Said El brightly. "Could we take Mike? His shift is over and we were planning to go out, " she added.

"Of course! I forget sometimes, you know." He responded.

Mike came running out of the back with the jacket his mom had made him take to work, even though it was June and the Indiana summer was sweltering. "Bye Mr. Keane! See you Tuesday!"

The man didn't even have a chance to answer before the group of teenagers was gone down the street.

At the crosswalk, they stopped for the light, allowing Mike to catch the breath he'd lost running away.

"Jesus fucking Christ! I thought he was gonna keep me there all day!"

"Better watch that mouth, Mikey, you never know who's listening. If your mom caught wind of you cussing, you'd be at Bible camp for the rest of summer."

"Shut up, Dustin! I am so not in the mood right now."

Lucas and Will had their eyes on Mike and El, watching to see what they could possibly be doing that was allowing them to communicate. The boys saw nothing, much to their disappointment and El's amusement.

Lucas and Will are watching us.

Mike squeezed her hand. ***I know. You didn't tell them yet did you?***

Nope.

The group had decided upon the ice cream shop near the arcade, since they needed a cool treat, and the arcade afterwards because it was fun and had AC.

While the boys went up to order, Max went to the restroom and El found a table to sit at. She sat next to the window in the booth, saving a spot for Mike next to her, then she looked for him in line, spotting a mass of dark hair sticking up in all directions near the front of the line.

I want Neapolitan with strawberry sauce today instead of chocolate, okay? Trying something new.

Sure thing!

"Can I get a plain vanilla and a Neapolitan with strawberry sauce, please? Thanks." As he paid, Mike noticed Dustin looking askance at him, and Lucas and Will waiting for their ice creams whispering to each other. ***They're suspicious of me now 'cause I didn't ask for your usual! This is funny.*** He smiled to himself, looking like 'a homeless frog', as El would put it.

Once everyone had dug into their ice cream, Dustin turned to Mike. "How'd you know that's what El wanted? It's so different from her usual, and I didn't hear her ask you," he said.

Mike shrugged and looked at El next to him, passing the torch onto her.

"You said you'd explain, El!" Exclaimed Lucas.

She raised her arms defensively, allowing Max (who was across from her) to steal a spoonful of her ice cream.

"Okay, jeez! We're talking to each other, but in our heads. We discovered it by accident the other day," El said, speaking as quietly as possible in order to avoid other people around them overhearing.

The boys sat slack-jawed, while Max continued eating her ice cream contentedly.

"Just when you think there's nothing she can't do, she does something you never would have thought possible!" Said Dustin, awestruck. "I'm gonna have to marry you El, that's it, you're too awesome for me not to. Sorry, Mike," he added.

"Hey! You have your own girlfriend, stick with her and leave mine alone!"

Max chose that moment to smear ice cream on Dustin's face, shocking him and causing his arm to hit Lucas, hard. Lucas choked on the spoon in his mouth and started coughing, which made them all start laughing.

"Dustin! Seriously, man, we're in public!"

"It wasn't my fault!"

As the two started bickering Will and Max kept laughing, and El finished her ice cream and leaned on Mike.

I love these guys, Mike.

Me too, El, me too.

10. Chapter 10

J is for Jealous

August 1985, Hawkins, IN

"Why are you acting so strangely? Are you jealous of Jared?" Asked El.

Mike was peeved.

This had all started on the second day of school, the very beginning of freshman year. It was Eleven's first year of school ever, and she was the most excited out of all of them, of course. Mike found her enthusiasm absolutely adorable, but then he found everything about her absolutely adorable.

Unfortunately, Mike only had three classes with her out of six. They were together in first, third, and sixth periods for study hall, PE, and english, respectively. While they had history in the same period, El had a different teacher and therefore was in a different class, and it was in that very class that the teacher had already assigned a project. A *partnered* project. And El's partner happened to be Jared Simmons.

Hence why Mike was pissed. Due to the project, El hadn't been able to spend as much time with Mike as she usually did and he was missing her. Knowing that she was spending her time with another boy...

So he was acting weird. He didn't really see it, but his friends did, and so did El, no matter how sure he was that she didn't notice these types of things.

"Mike!" It was a whisper. He snapped around to look at Dustin.

"What?!"

"Why are you glaring at Jared?"

Mike stared at him. "I'm not *glaring*! I'm just... looking," he whispered back, glancing over at the boy in question. Dustin snorted.

"Yeah, I believe that. You're totally jealous."

Mike was scandalized. "I am *not*! You don't know what you're talking about."

Dustin nodded. "Sure, sure. It's sooo not because he's El's partner for her history project. I know jealousy when I see it, Mike, and you have it bad."

Mike did not appreciate such commentary, and so decided to ignore his friend.

A week later, Eleven herself was fed up with her favourite person acting so strangely around her. It felt like he was mad at her, but she couldn't think of what she could have done to make him so. She had even spoken to Jared about it, not trusting the other boys or Max to keep Mike out of the loop and hoping Jared would shed some light on the situation. The conversation had gone like this:

"I think Mike's mad at me."

"Well what'd you do?"

"That's it! I can't think of anything!"

"Hmm. This is Mike Wheeler you're talking about, right? Not Russo?"

"Yeah, I'm not friends with Mike Russo."

"I don't think he's mad at you, then. If you can't think of anything you might have done, I don't think he'd be mad for no reason. It sounds like he's jealous."

"Why would he be jealous, though?"

"That you're spending so much time with me for this project, probably. The dude's practically in love with you."

"He's practically in love with me?!"

"El, literally everyone can see how you guys feel about each other! Are you both seriously that blind?"

She had shoved him quite violently, so much so that he almost fell off the chair he was sitting on, but he was also laughing so much at her indignation that the librarian had to come over and ask them to be quiet.

Afterwards, she had resolved to speak to Mike herself as soon as she could get him alone. This happened to be a few days later during study hall, since they had it together and could talk in relatively private conditions. Which led to the situation Mike found himself in at the moment.

"W-what? Why are you asking that?" He spluttered.

El gave him a look. "You've been acting weird and I want to know why."

Mike scratched his head. "I guess I- I am. I just- I miss hanging out with you, El. I know you have to be with Jared because of your project but I still wish you could be with me instead and I'm really just mad at myself because I know I'm being stupid," he said, glancing at the girl in front of him and then fixing his gaze on his shoelaces.

Suddenly, Mike felt her hands on his cheeks pulling his face down to her level. *Is she going to kiss me?!*

"Mike, look at me." He did as told. "I'm not going to stop hanging out with you. You're my best friend and my favourite person in the entire world, you don't have to worry. Stop being silly!" El squished his cheeks and smiled at him. "You're so cute."

Then she walked away to another section to grab a book she needed, leaving Mike a blushing mess at their table.

11. Chapter 11

Hey guys! I know it's been quite a while... I've started university which was very time-consuming and so is my workload, so my updates are most likely going to be even less frequent because I need to focus on my work. This chapter might be a bit confusing because of all the OCs introduced. Most of them will probably be irrelevant, but here they are: You've already met Henry and Vienna, babychilds of everyone's favourite couple, #mileven

Ayla: only babychild of #jancy

Vince, Phillip, Ryan: Vince is Will's partner, Phillip and Ryan are their adopted twin sons

Jordan: only babychild of Max

Alex, Sabrina, Lucia: babychilds of Dustin and his (ex)wife Francesca

Sheila: Lucas' niece

Elora: whom you've also already met, Henry's bff

Lucjan, Jason, Emily, Avery: Lucjan is Holly's husband, Jason, Emily, and Avery are their children

Hope you enjoy and please leave comments!

K is for Kiss

December 2015, Hawkins, IN

"Mommy! Emily fell!"

"Uncle Jonathan, can you take a look at my blog? I think I'm getting into photography."

"Jordan, pass me the salt!"

"DAD! HENRY'S BEING A DICK AGAIN!"

"VIENNA, I HAVE TOLD YOU NOT TO USE THAT WORD!"

The house was already full when the last bit of family arrived, adding four Hendersons to the mix. In times past, Karen would have been freaking out at the amount of people in her house, but these last few years Grandma Wheeler was only allowed to bake copious amounts of cookies in the days leading up to Christmas. This was followed by a relegation to the couch next to her husband. It was a good thing that Ted had since gone nearly deaf, because he had always hated overly loud environments (which his family had evolved to become, unfortunately for him).

It was El who answered the door in her place. Karen loved Eleven very much, and if asked would say that El was her favourite in-law. Not to say that she didn't like Jonathan or Lucjan, but Karen had simply always adored the girl's relationship with Mike, and by default adored her as well. Generally, Karen just loved this whole rag-tag family to pieces, even though technically most of its members weren't actually related to her.

As the Hendersons piled in, Karen heard her granddaughters come running up the staircase. Ayla had come to grab Sabrina, and Vienna in search of Lucia. The four girls squealed excitedly at their reunion, while Alexander joined Jordan and Max in the kitchen and Dustin greeted El.

"Where's Mike and the guys?" Asked Dustin.

"Down in the basement, I think Mike's showing them something. Though I don't know why he decided to do that now, what with all the kids down there," answered El. "Y'know, Mike things," she added with a snort.

Dustin smiled. "It's good to see you. I heard Holly is pregnant again?" He said, removing his jacket and hanging it on the drowning coat tree.

El nodded. "Yup, two months. I don't know how she's going to manage four young kids, I could barely handle my two with a lot of help from Mike *and* they have a five year age gap," she joked.

"To be fair though, yours have crazy supernatural powers."

Max observed one of her oldest friends as he passed on his way to the basement, waving. He looked good. Very good, for being divorced with three kids at 44. *Agh, stop thinking that! We broke up!* The two had dated in high school but had split up to go their own ways, much the opposite of their happily married friends Mike and El. Max herself had never donned a ring.

Turning back to the pot of mashed potatoes on the stove, she forced herself to focus on the things left to be done before dinner. "Jordan, can you and Alex set the tables please? We're twenty nine including Jason, Emily, and Avery," she said. Her daughter opened the cupboard and started counting plates.

In the dining room, there were two tables of six pushed together, making eleven places. That would be for some of the adults, Jordan decided. A smaller table of five was next to it, which could be for Holly, Lucjan, and their three kids. On the other side was an even smaller table seating only two, which gave Jordan an idea. Having no more space in the dining room, the kids and teens were sent to the basement where there was a long folding table seating twelve. Karen and Ted had had to purchase more tables over the years as their family grew and they insisted on still being the hosts for Christmas dinner.

Jordan walked over to the long table where Alex was setting out some plates. "So," she began, "I think my mom likes your dad."

Alex nodded. "Didn't they date in high school?"

"I think so. What do you say we put them both at the little table for some quality conversation?" She suggested with a smirk. Alex stopped to look at her.

"I like the way you think."

Soon it was time for dinner, and all the kids were ready for a feast (Aunt Max and Uncle Mike were excellent cooks, while Aunts El and Nancy were marvellous bakers). Once all the rowdiness had ceased, it was time to eat. Elora, not being a family member, was awkwardly

trying to sit somewhere. Henry had gotten squished between two of his cousins and while Elora liked Vienna just fine, she didn't exactly want to sit and talk with a bunch of little kids at dinner.

Just when she was about to give up and sit with Vienna and the other girl (Ayla, maybe? Or was it Lucia?), someone else tapped her shoulder. It was Sheila! Sheila was the only other person whose name Elora had managed to remember, because she was also randomly in Hawkins for Christmas and Elora found it funny.

"Come sit with me, I don't really know these guys either," she said, smiling.

They found a seat at the middle of the table, next to the girl with red hair and across from the curly-haired dude, who appeared to be having an intense discussion regarding something happening upstairs.

"Wait, what's happening?" Asked Elora.

The redhead turned to her. "Me and Alex put my mom and his dad sitting together, 'cause we think they could use a conversation. I know my mom and I'm pretty sure she likes him," the girl added.

Elora smiled. "Matchmaking, huh?"

"It's my specialty," the girl answered. "I'm Jordan, by the way, and this is Alex," she said, gesturing to the curly-haired dude. "I don't know who you guys are, I'm sorry! It's been all rushing around and stuff, I knew there were going to be new people here but I haven't had the time to introduce myself."

"I'm Sheila," said Sheila.

"You're Uncle Lucas' niece, right?" Asked Alex. Sheila nodded, already piling food onto her plate.

"I'm Elora," said Elora. "I'm Henry's friend," she added.

Jordan furrowed her brow. "His friend? And he brought you all the way from Indianapolis to spend Christmas with the family? Sounds like a more-than-friends type of situation if you ask me," she answered. Across the table, Alex snorted.

"You need to calm down, Jordan. Not everyone is into each other the way you think they are."

Elora was blushing. "N-no, um, we're just friends. I mean, he's my best friend, but just that."

Jordan nodded and didn't say anything, but Elora could tell that she wasn't going to drop the subject entirely.

Alex smiled at Elora. "Excuse her, she's just being a dumbass like usual," he said. "So what does bring you here? How come you aren't spending Christmas with your family?"

Elora began scooping food onto her plate as she explained. "My sister's in her second year of college and she decided to stay in L.A. this year so my parents went on a cruise," she said, setting her plate down and pouring herself a drink.

"It was either go with my parents, which I didn't want because I'm terrified of sailing, or stay with my sister, which I didn't want either because I don't really like her. She's rude and condescending to me, but it's not the way siblings usually are, she's just mean. So I was gonna go be subjected to a terrible Christmas in L.A. until Henry told his parents and they offered to bring me to Hawkins with them," she continued, sitting down.

"I almost didn't come, but Henry came over one day and worked his magic to convince my parents to let me. Sometimes I think they love him more than me," she joked.

She had been quite surprised that Henry had gone to such lengths for her, but when she asked him all he said was that he refused to allow his best friend to have a terrible Christmas if there was anything he could do about it. *Best friend...* If only he could come to his senses and realize that he wasn't just her best friend, he was much more. *Stupid idiot.*

Alex's sunny disposition and Jordan's extra-ness made Elora feel welcomed at the table, so as she dug into her food she asked the question she'd been waiting to ask for ages.

"So, who's gonna tell me funny family stories?"

"Oh, we have a shit ton of those..."

Meanwhile, as Holly and Lucjan wrestled their children into their seats and Karen helped Ted in from the living room, Mike was in the kitchen taking the second turkey out of the oven. He had noticed that Max and Dustin were together. Turning to his wife, who was checking on the JELL-O in the fridge, he asked "Do you think Jordan did that?"

El glanced in the direction he was pointing out. "Probably. You know her, remember when she was little and tried to get Holly together with that random boy at the mall?"

Mike smiled. "Okay, she's crazy, but you have to admit that it was funny!"

She nodded. "It was. Do you think she'll try anything with Henry and Elora?"

He shrugged, looking at the steaming bird on the counter. "Maybe. I don't think he likes her like that yet, or if he does he hasn't realized it."

"Yet?" El closed the fridge and turned around to look at her husband, who proceeded to stare at her. "Hello?" She waved her hand in front of his face. "Earth to Mike!"

He kissed her. "Merry Christmas, ma chérie," he said in a very bad French accent. "I always forget how beautiful you are and sometimes I have to stare."

She slapped his arm. "You're so dumb," she laughed. "You're plenty handsome yourself."

There was a second of silence before Mike raised his eyebrows and pointed to the ceiling. "Mistletoe!"

They were about to kiss again when Hopper interjected from the dining room. "Hey, are you two gonna bring in the turkey or am I gonna have to separate you like I used to 30 years ago?"

"Dad! We're 44!"

After the tables had been cleared from dinner and dessert had been eaten too, the kids were left in the basement as the teenagers headed upstairs. Henry caught up to Elora at the back of the pack on the way out of the basement.

"Hey, El, how are you finding everyone? I know it's a lot of people to keep track of," he said.

She shrugged. "Jordan and Alex are pretty cool, and I talked to Sheila as well. Haven't met anyone else though."

He smiled, happy that she was liking his "cousins", even though the ones she'd talked to weren't his *actual* cousins. It was time to introduce her to teen tradition: a game of honesty hour. It didn't sound intense, but in *their* games it was quite the experience. Everyone seemed to share a dislike of dares, so honesty hour was like a better version of truth or dare. Plus you really got to know who you were with on a personal level. It was the teens' bonding ritual, and part of the reason they were all so close with each other even though they lived all over and saw each other rarely.

The bunch was led into Nancy's old room, where Elora and Vienna were staying over the holidays. Being the last ones to enter the room, Henry and Elora sat together on the floor facing the bed. Jordan and Alex were taking it up as the de facto leaders of the group (although really it was mostly Jordan).

"Okay, kiddos, it's Ayla's first year and we've got some newbies! Warning: this game always gets a bit explicit so don't be shocked. Only rule is nobody tells their parents anything, what happens in this room stays in this room. Let us begin!" Proclaimed Jordan enthusiastically. "Who wants to go first?"

Phillip was ready from the exact point they'd left off last year. "Jordan, have you ever fucked Alex and if not then would you?"

There was a resounding "Ooooooooooooo," in the room. This had been asked last year but the answer had been interrupted by the clock striking midnight and them being called downstairs by their parents.

Henry thought it was funny because he could see that Phil only wanted to know since he himself thought Jordan was hot and if Alex could get her then maybe he could too. Henry also thought that Phil needed to calm down. He loved Phil, but Jordan was obviously not interested.

"Fuck off, Phil! I haven't, and I wouldn't. Alex is like the brother I never had, you know?"

Phil seemed disappointed. Henry's phone vibrated in his pocket.

El /heart emoji/: *R all the questions like that*

Fool: *Not always but pretty much*

He could see his text messages being received and discovered that his name in Elora's phone wasn't actually his name.

Fool: *Why is my name fool youre so rude to me*

El /heart emoji/: *Bc ur a fool duh they picked you to play puck lol*

Fool: *Excuse me im offended puck is very wise*

El /heart emoji/: *Ok but hes also an ass like u r*

Fool: *Go away -.-*

Meanwhile, Jordan had asked Sheila if she'd ever had any pets she didn't like, to which she said no because she'd never had any pets. Henry thought this was an oddly tame question coming from Jordan, but he let it go. Sheila then asked Alex what he really thought of college, seeing as he was in his first year there. It was also a tame question, but Henry gave her a pass since she was one of the newbies and the game was still beginning.

About forty minutes in, after a series of interruptions by Jason and Emily escaping upstairs, there was finally a question directed at Henry. He'd been hoping his family had forgotten his existence because they always asked him the most embarrassing questions, but alas his wish was not to be granted.

"Henry!" Jordan. *Oh god.* "How many crushes have you had and who were they?" He cringed, face heating up.

"J, why do you always have to ask such embarrassing questions?"

"Just answer!" Everyone was looking at him, Elora with particular interest.

He picked at his socks. "Um, there was- three, I think? Elora, Angela, and Maria," he said.

"You liked me?" Elora asked incredulously. He couldn't look at her, so he focused on Jordan instead, who was smirking on the bed. *Dammit Jordan! Jeez...*

"Yeah, for like a year. Fourth grade." *Well that wasn't embarrassing at all*, thought Henry.

Ten minutes after that, it was somehow Jordan's turn again, and this time she directed her question to Elora. "Have you had your first kiss, and if so who was it?"

Henry could now see what Jordan was up to. Clearly, she thought there was something between them and was directing her questions in such a way as to try to expose whatever she thought it was. Jordan and her matchmaking ways...

Elora had turned a bit darker, and Henry knew why because he knew perfectly well the answer to this question. She mumbled something that Jordan couldn't hear, but Sabrina was on Elora's other side and close enough.

"Did you say it was Henry? *This* one?" Added the girl, pointing at him. Elora nodded, pretending to inspect her feet, but Henry saw her look at him sideways.

Another loud "Oooooooooooooo," was heard. Even Ryan, who wasn't usually that into other people's lives and therefore this game, had had his interest piqued.

"Wait, I wanna hear the whole story now," he said. Jordan's face was taken up by a smile that could only be described as evil. It seemed

she had found what she was looking for.

"Tell us," she urged. And so the story came about, words tumbling out of Elora's mouth as they both became more and more embarrassed.

She scratched her head, staring at her socks. "It was over Christmas break in like sixth or seventh grade, I think? It's really awkward to tell and I hate you guys for making me tell it, ugh. Basically I was over at his house and we were playing GTA but then I died and we went to have a cookie break. Mrs. Wheeler makes the *best* cookies, right? So we're standing there in the kitchen eating cookies and I decided to ask..."

At this point she turned to Henry, silently asking him to continue. He cleared his throat awkwardly. "She just asked if I would kiss her because she wanted to know what it felt like," he said, bright red. "So I did. That's what happened. Are you happy now?"

Jordan smiled again, clearly satisfied. "Thank you for the beautiful story, peeps. This, unfortunately, brings an end to our game. Until next year!"

"Kids! It's time for the picture!" Yelled Vince from the bottom of the stairs.

"Right on time," said Phil. "Coming, Dad!"

As everyone rushed out and down to the ground level for the annual family photo, Henry and Elora were once again the last ones left.

"Hey, I'm sorry they asked that, it's really awkward. Jordan can kind of be a dick sometimes."

Elora smoothed down some stray baby hairs. "It's fine, dude."

"Cool?"

She smiled.

"Cool."

12. Chapter 12

UPDATES FOR MY PEEPS: I really love this chapter and it literally came to me last night lol hope you enjoy

L is for Life

February 1999, Indianapolis, IN

Eleven walked out of the doctor's office almost in tears. It wasn't anything bad! She'd been so stressed the past few weeks, thinking that she might have some kind of deadly illness. Mike had told her repeatedly she needed to see a doctor and even offered to come with her, but she was so scared of receiving bad news that she didn't want him to know right away if it *was* something terrible. She only ended up coming in the first place because her insistent husband had called and made an appointment on her behalf.

Now though, she was kind of regretting it. She wished he could have been there to hear the diagnosis firsthand, but it also now offered her the option of coming up with a creative way to tell him herself... Luckily for her, Valentine's Day was just around the corner, and it would be their fourteenth as a couple.

Hey, Mike!

No answer. Damn. She waited a few minutes before trying again, because he was at work and probably busy (Mike worked in a downtown restaurant part-time, the rest of the time he was at home writing or else with his editor).

Mike! Helloooooooooo, your wife is calling!

Sorry, I was taking someone's order. What's up? What did the doctor say?

El hadn't thought this through and so had to make up an excuse on the spot. She was glad that Mike was an expert at reading her face and not her thoughts, otherwise he'd have known something was up. *Nothing much, he said it's probably either stomach flu or some other bug*

that's been going around.

Okay, doesn't sound too bad! That explains the vomiting. Do you need anything?

No, I'm fine! I'll see you later?

Promise. Love you.

Love you too.

That night, Mike would return to find his favourite person in the world lying in bed watching TV, all snuggled up under the comforter just as she liked to be. She smiled when he entered the bedroom.

"Hey."

"Hey," he answered, turning to the chair in the corner to dump his clothes. Once he had his pyjamas on, Mike opened the blinds to let in the moonlight as El switched the TV off. Slipping into bed and burrowing under the covers to cuddle and be warm was just about his favourite thing to do ever (there were other, also fun, *activities* in which he enjoyed partaking, but nothing could top this).

Peeking his head out from under the covers to look at her, he asked "So how are you feeling? You look a bit better."

She nodded. "I feel a lot better now that I know it's nothing really serious." At this, El's face was taken over by a smile so wide she could barely contain it.

"What? Why are you smiling like that?" Her grin was contagious though, and it was all over Mike too even if he didn't know why.

"I'm pregnant."

There was silence for a moment. Then: "What?!"

"I was going to wait until Valentine's to tell you but I just realized I can't wait that long!"

Mike grasped her hands, not even noticing their frigid temperature.

He could feel tears pooling in his eyes. "You're pregnant? I-I'm going to be a dad? We're going to be parents? A real life baby?!"

His tears were making her eyes water too. "Yes, a real life baby, you idiot!" She choked. "We made a little life and it's here with us right now," said El, removing her hands from his hold and bringing one of his to her belly. "It's here," she whispered.

They both stared at the point under the duvet where they knew their hands lay, imagining how much life was about to change for them. Suddenly, Mike let out a watery laugh. "I can't believe I'm gonna be a dad," he said. "God, I love you so much." He snuggled up to her as close as he could and kissed her nose. "Probably the only person I'll ever love more than you is this baby."

They locked eyes for a minute or two, simply taking each other in, until El closed hers and pressed her lips to his for a brief kiss. "I love you, Mike."

"Well, I mean, yeah, who doesn't-ow!"

"Hopper doesn't!"

"Are you kidding me? That man loves me like Dustin loves chocolate pudding! But you love me even more so who cares, right?"

"...Idiot."

"You just say that 'cause you know I'm right."

Silence, then a chuckle. "I love you too, El. So much. Good night," he added.

"Good night, you mouthbreather."

He could hear the smile in her voice.

~HEHEHEHE BET YOU THOUGHT SHE WAS GONNA WAIT DIDNT YOU?

13. Chapter 13

guYS, SEASON 2 HAS ME SHOOK I SAW IT TWICE ON FRIDAY AND SATURDAY AND I CANT DEAL,, we can disregard chapter B of this fic since we now know thats not what happened at ALL, but I still ship Maxtin and Millie does too so idrc

so listen,, this chapter has been half-written for a long time but it had to be posted toDay because ReASOnS you will understand if you pay attention to the date I use in this fic, that was a real U2 concert for the *The Joshua Tree* tour in 1987 you can google it

thanks everyone for your lovely comments and continued support of my writing, I REALLY APPRECIATE IT OK

now,, without further ado,, I present: Chapter M

M is for Man, Do I Love You

October 1987, Hawkins, IN

"Hey Mom, can I talk to you?"

Karen looked up from her candy-sorting Halloween preparation to see her 16-year old son in the dining room doorway. Holly had been asleep for upwards of two hours, and Ted was of course snoring in the La-Z-Boy. She thought Mike had gone to bed already.

"Of course, Mike. What is it?"

He joined her sitting at the table, fiddling with his fingers.

"So um, U2 is coming to Indianapolis on November 1st. They're selling tickets at the record shop, Mr. Keane told me when I was at work yesterday. I wanted to take El to go see them," he said, already pleading with his large eyes and pitiful expression.

"Alright, what day is that?"

"Um, two Sundays from today."

Sunday? "Michael, that's a school night."

He sighed.

"Knew you would say that. Mom please, they're her favourite band and it's for our anniversary. Two years! And we can miss Monday, what's one day? We can ask our teachers what they'll be covering, so it's fine! Please? I really want to take her!"

Ahh, they're adorable. You've raised a good boy. Just this once, Karen.

"Oh, alright. I don't see what harm it'll do you as long as you're not missing any important material. Make sure you talk to your teachers then, okay?"

Mike was beaming. "She's gonna love it! Thanks so much, Mom! Good night!" He departed after giving her a kiss on the cheek.

Karen watched him go bemusedly, then shook her head and returned to her candies.

Teenagers.

The next time Mike went to work (which was Tuesday), he asked Mr. Keane about the tickets.

"They're ten dollars each, Mike. Why do you ask?"

Mike shuffled his feet, blushing. "I want to take my girlfriend for our anniversary."

Mr. Keane smiled. "You mean that pretty girl I see you around town with all the time? She comes in here sometimes, you know. Talks to me a bit. Never comes when you're here though, I assume she doesn't want to distract you from your job!"

Mike laughed awkwardly. "I guess not, sir. Um, so about those tickets..."

"Yes! Here you are, m'boy," said Mr. Keane, handing two tickets to Mike as he forked over twenty dollars. "I hope you have fun with your girlie. Anniversary, you said?"

Mike was feeling increasingly itchy, so he scratched his head. It must have been due to how awkward this conversation was. Since when did Mr. Keane care about the doings of the teenagers in this town? He was an older man, into his late sixties.

"Uh, yes, sir. Two years."

The record store owner looked at Mike over his glasses.

"Two years? That's a long time for someone your age. What are you, fourteen?"

Mike's face burned. "Sixteen, sir. If I was fourteen I wouldn't be working, it's illegal."

Mr. Keane rolled his eyes. "Laws, schmaws! When I was a kid, we'd work at whatever job we could get from eleven, sometimes ten or nine. We needed money."

Mike nodded, if only to placate the man before he went on one of his weekly rants. "Yes, sir."

Luckily, he was saved from having to continue that conversation by a customer entering the store. Mike could only hope that his boss would forget about it completely after the customer left.

A week before the concert, Mike dropped by the Byers-Hopper place. Will answered the door.

"Hey, Mike, what's up?" He asked.

"Nothing much. Is Ellie home?"

Will snorted. "Of course you came to see your girlfriend. Poor Will, nobody cares about him! Yeah, she's home," he said, going back inside and motioning for Mike to follow. "And since when do you call her Ellie?"

Mike blushed. "Holly's always called her that. It just caught on, I guess. She likes it though," he answered, shrugging.

Will sank back into the couch in front of *Return of the Jedi* as his

sister's boyfriend closed the door. "El! Mike's here!"

There was a muffled "Okay!" from down the hall. Mike thanked Will and greeted Joyce in the adjoining kitchen before he made his way in the direction of El's room. Upon knocking, he heard "Come in," and his excitement only built as he entered her bedroom.

She was lying on her bed leaning against the pillows, reading a book. 97.3 Hawkins FM was playing softly in the background.

"Hey, babe," she said.

Mike raised his eyebrows as he sat on the end of the bed by her feet. "Since when do you call me babe?"

"Since right now."

"Hmm, okay. I guess I'll take it."

"You better."

He laughed. "What are you reading?"

She lifted the book so he could see the cover.

"*The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood... never heard of her. Is it any good?" He asked.

"Eh. I like it, but I don't think it's gonna be my favourite book ever." She responded.

"I see. Well, guess what I got?"

She put the book down and sat up. "I don't know, a new record?"

He smiled. "No, but close."

"A promotion?"

"Hah! Like Keane's gonna promote me! What would he even promote me to?"

"I don't know! Don't tell me yet, let me guess. A new comic?"

"Nope."

"Video game?" He shook his head.

"The latest version of D&D?"

"No, but that would be nice."

"You got to see Troy get his ass kicked?"

Mike laughed again. "Nah, not that. I've seen you do that enough times anyway. I said you were close after your first guess, come on!"

She thought about it. "It's gotta be music related, then... is it new manuscript?"

Mike had been learning piano since he was little. Karen had taken him to an intro to music day at the community centre when he was about four years old, and he had fallen in love with the instrument. He loved to mess around with it and compose his own stuff as a bit of a hobby. Unfortunately, he had run out of empty manuscript, so he had had to take to regular lined paper to notate his creations until the store stocked some more.

"Dude, I told you I bought some like last week. Keane even gave me a discount, remember?"

El let out a frustrated sigh. "I give up! Just tell me."

He whipped something out of his pocket. "U2 is coming to Indianapolis next Sunday and I got us tickets!"

Her eyes widened and she shrieked. "You did not!"

"I did! Keane told me about it so I asked my mom and she said it was fine. I said we can skip school Monday since we'll be back late, so we just gotta ask our teachers what we'll be missing," he added.

El launched herself at her boyfriend and landed a kiss. It had started to get a bit heated before he pulled away, gasping. "We have to- we gotta stop before someone comes in!"

"Why?" She whined.

"Because I like living, thanks!"

El laughed, sticking her hand back into his hair and playing with it. "Alright, alright. I do like having you alive. But seriously, you're amazing! God, I'm so excited! What time will you pick me up?"

Mike held the hand that wasn't in his hair. "I thought we could stop somewhere and have dinner first, where do you want to go?"

El considered it for a second. "McDonald's. You?"

"Sounds good. Okay, Indianapolis is about two and a half hours away, give or take, and the concert starts at 8:30, so we should leave here at about 5:30 to give us a little leeway. Is half an hour at McDonald's enough time?"

She nodded. "Even if it's not, we can always finish in the car."

"Okay, so McDonald's at 5. I'll pick you up around 4:50 then," he said, turning his head to look at her.

El grinned. "I can't wait." She ran a finger over his cheeks before giving him another quick kiss.

"I love your freckles. You're so beautiful."

"Thanks, Ellie. You're so much more beautiful than me, though."

She giggled. "Oh, stop it. You just say that."

"I don't! You really are. I don't think you know how much you mean to me."

"If it's half as much as what you mean to me then it's already as big as the universe."

On Sunday, November 1st, 1987, at exactly 4:49 PM, Mike Wheeler pulled up to the Byers-Hopper residence to begin what would be one of the most memorable nights of his life.

El came out the door wearing a pair of jeans, a thick sweater with a thicker coat over it, and the Converse Max had given her for her sixteenth birthday in May. Mike himself was wearing jeans, a turtleneck sweater, and Converse. They were in matching outfits, which El realized as soon as she got a good look at him.

"We almost look like twins instead of a couple," she commented.

"Except for the fact that we don't look anything alike," he answered, pulling the car out of the driveway and turning in the direction of town.

"Right. How could I have forgotten."

Mike smiled at her monotone. "What do you want from McD's?"

At McDonald's they saw Max. She had gotten a job there during their sophomore year to save some money up for college. She smiled when she saw her friends come in.

"What'll it be for you two?"

Once they had ordered and sat down, she came over and sat with them for a bit. The restaurant was fairly empty, and it was nearing her break time anyway.

"Where are you guys going? Date?" She asked.

Mike nodded. "Anniversary's in three weeks, but the concert is tonight," he said, between bites of his hamburger.

"We're going to Indianapolis, U2 concert!" Added El.

Max gasped. "That's your favourite band!" She turned to Mike. "Dude, you are literally the best boyfriend ever. You're one lucky girl, Ellie," she continued.

Mike smirked. "Better than *your* boyfriend? I'll be sure to tell Dustin you said so," he said.

Max rolled her eyes. "No one beats Mike Wheeler at the Boyfriend Games™. You can tell Dustin he needs to up his game," she added.

The three friends laughed, they all knew Max was happy as could be with Dustin. It had been difficult for her after moving to Hawkins and being thrown into the mess that had happened along with dealing with her family, so it was good that Max had someone she could always count on. She knew she could always count on all of them, but Dustin was different.

Soon Mike and El were on their way once again, stomachs full. For the last half hour, El had been changing radio stations every time the one they were listening to played a song she didn't like or went on commercial. She decided she was tired of it.

"What tapes do you have in here?" She asked.

Her boyfriend nodded at the armrest between them. "Whatever's in there," he answered, removing his arm so she could open it and have a look. El riffled through the stacks of tapes quickly, already having a sort of sense of what was there but not entirely sure because obviously his entire tape collection wasn't in his car. She and Mike had pretty similar taste in music. She saw some Bowie, New Order, A Flock Of Seagulls, and Pet Shop Boys.

"I still haven't found what I'm looking for," she said, trying her hardest to keep a straight face as she looked at Mike. He was smiling.

"Is that an actual statement or a really stupid joke?"

"Both," she managed to get out before she started laughing. He joined her, all the while keeping his eyes on the highway in front of them.

"You're so dumb sometimes, you know that? Just find the damn tape already, I know I put it in there! I wasn't about to bring you to a U2 concert and not have it."

She whipped it out. "Aha! Here it is!" As soon as she put it in the player she settled back for a comfy ride with her favourite person and her favourite music. However, the calm didn't last long. Through the first two songs, both of them were just humming along or enjoying some easy listening, but when the third song started Mike decided it would be a good time to serenade her.

"With or without youuuuuuuuuuu, with or without you AHAAAAAA! I CAN'T LIIIIIIIIIIIVE WITH OR WITHOUUUUT YOUUUUUUUUUUU!" He crooned, trying his best not to start laughing.

"Stop, stop, you're ruining the song you idiot!" He actually wasn't that bad of a singer, he would sing for her sometimes but only when there was no one else around. Well, Will was acceptable maybe, but Max, Dustin, and Lucas would never let him live in peace if they found out. Ever.

He stopped, but his stupid smile was contagious and El couldn't contain herself. They started giggling as the song ended and the next one started. *I love you*, they wanted to say. *So much*. But they didn't.

It was kind of a dumb fear, Mike thought, but he also didn't think it was unfounded. What if he was just way in over his head and she didn't feel as strongly about him as he did her? What if she thought he was coming on too quick? He was a mess.

Eleven was conflicted. She could sense that Mike was feeling stressed and kind of... scared? He was also feeling really happy at the same time. It was weird, and she didn't know how to place the fear. What could he possibly be afraid of? There was literally nothing else in the car except her. It was sometimes frustrating that she couldn't hear what he was thinking, as just then would have been a good time.

When the duo reached their destination, With Or Without You was starting to play again on the tape. "Oh, come on, why do the best songs always have to play when we can't listen to them anymore?" Exclaimed Mike.

"Every time," added El, shaking her head. "At least it's not One Tree Hill."

"Mm, Exit is my favourite."

Walking into the Hoosier Dome, El was in shock. "Holy shit, that's a lot of seats!"

Mike laughed. "Well it is a football stadium and football is like, the most popular sport in America, so," he said. "But Hoosier Dome isn't

even big, I think it's the smallest NFL stadium in the country actually. In terms of seating capacity, I mean. Let's keep going, I think ours are over there."

Half an hour later, Mike was watching his girlfriend cry as her idols came out on stage, lights flashing and crowd screaming (himself included). The adrenaline rushing through him made him push his vocal cords to their limit, which he would later regret but at the moment could not be assed to care about. This was it!

Eleven couldn't have formed a sentence if she'd been asked to. Seeing her favourite band, these men she idolized and whose music she loved so much (if you asked her who she loved more, Mike or U2, she'd have a tough decision to make) made her heart feel like it was about to burst out of her chest and sucked all the air out of her lungs. It was almost like this whole time they weren't really real people, but then she was seeing them, *right here*, in front of her very eyes, and she was about to have the time of her life.

She turned to Mike. "THEY'RE REALLY THERE!" She screamed, jumping up and down with tears running down her face as he laughed next to her.

"THEY REALLY ARE!" He screamed back.

"I LOVE YOU SO MUCH!" Just as she said it, she realized what she'd said. *FUCK!* That wasn't how she wanted to tell him! *Oh god.*

Mike was in shock for a second, but then his face broke out into the widest smile she'd ever seen on him. "I LOVE YOU TOO!" He yelled. She grabbed him by the collar of his turtleneck and kissed him.

"I have the best boyfriend ever," she said, pulling back. He grinned again, starting to jump with her as the band began their first song.

When they played *With Or Without You* and everyone got lighters out, El grasped onto Mike's hand and pulled his arm up over her shoulder, wrapping herself into him as they sang. When he chanced a look at her, she was staring up at him with something like wonder, her large dark eyes reflecting the glow of fifty thousand lighters. It was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen in his life, and hearing

Bono's voice raw, live, brought tears to his eyes. Everything about the song described exactly how he felt about her. It was going to be one of *their* songs, forever. Michael Wheeler would always remember this night.

Upon starting the car to go home, the same song played. He'd forgotten that it had been what was left playing when they got to Indianapolis. El shattered the silence. "I meant it, you know."

"What?"

"I meant it. When I said I love you, it's not just because you brought me to the most amazing concert. It's just because you are who you are, and you helped give me the life I have. I love you so much, Mike."

He could feel the heat rising in his face. "Oh, um. Yeah, I know you meant it. I, um- I did too. I love you, too."

She smiled and turned it down a little bit. "This is one of *our* songs now, you hear? When you propose you better include it," she added.

They were both grinning ear to ear, staring straight ahead, hands clasped.

Mike scoffed. "*When* I propose?"

"You heard me."

"I see."

"Good."

"Good!"

There was silence for a second. "You know, I'd kiss you right now, but I don't really feel like making you crash the car."

Mike shot her a sly look. "I'll take that offer up tomorrow since we're not going to school."

"...I like how you think."

14. Chapter 14

well would YOU LOoK At thAT A NEw chAptEr!? I will most likely never update this quickly ever again i mean i just posted chapter M yesterday?!

i had the idea for this while on the subway heading to campus this morning and i've just sat down and written it because YeS i needed my college!Mileven stat

yes ik it might seem a little unrealistic that they go to the same university but there will be another chapter that explains that, its just faaaaar away rn

also i feel like mike and el are kinda OOC in this, so please please let me know how you feel about their characterization

anyways, pls enjoy some wholesome mileven pretending they dont know each other bc they find it funny to fuck with people they just met :)

N is for New People, New Jokes

August 1989, Iowa City, IA

Today was move-in day and El was kind of nervous. Not about being far from her family, she had done *that* before and besides Mike was just upstairs moving into his room. She was nervous about having to meet so many new people. Would they like her? Would she make friends? Her roommate- would they get along? It would really suck if they didn't since they would have to live together for at least a year. Mostly she was worried about friends. The only real friends she'd ever had had been the boys and Max, but those had been made under different circumstances. She knew Mike was always there if she needed him but she also knew that she had to branch out and make her own friends, just as he would have to. Neither of them was very social, but it would have to be done.

Upon arrival at her room on the second floor of Hillcrest Hall, El noticed that her roommate wasn't there yet. *Phew. Saves me from*

having to walk in awkwardly. She dropped her stuff on the floor and sat on the bottom bunk.

Is your roommate there yet?

Not yet, it's just me right now. I hope he's not really messy or something because that would suck.

Mine's not here yet either. I'm kinda nervous to meet her...

You'll be fine, don't worry. I'm gonna start getting my stuff into the drawers, I'll see you at the res orientation later?

Yeah. See you later. Love you.

Love you too! She could hear the smile in his voice.

For the next fifteen minutes, El devoted herself to putting her clothes in the drawers by the window, leaving the bed unmade because she wasn't sure whether her roommate would want the top or bottom bunk. Just as she was pushing away her second-to-last suitcase, there was a knock at the door.

"Um... come in!" She wiped her hands nervously on her jeans, turning to look. In walked a girl with wildly frizzy dark hair and large glasses. She had a big smile on her face.

"Hi, I'm Genevieve, but you can call me Jenny!" *Alright, this isn't so bad... she seems friendly!*

El waved a hand awkwardly. "I'm Jane, but most people call me El. Weird childhood nickname."

Jenny nodded. "Sounds cool. So where are you from, El?"

"Indiana. You?"

"Wyoming. Kinda boring, if you ask me. Indiana sounds more interesting. You got any siblings?"

El was beginning to smile, already warming up to Jenny. "Yeah, two step-brothers at home and a sister in Chicago. Although my brothers

aren't home anymore, one's in New York and the other one moved to Montréal. Starving artist, he says," she answered, shaking her head.

"That's so cool! Kinda sucks they moved so far though doesn't it?"

"I guess. But they're happy, so I'm happy. How about you? Do you have siblings?"

They continued getting to know the basics of each other for a few minutes (Jenny seemed very excitable, which El liked because it made up for her own nervousness) while putting away their things and El was a bit surprised that Jenny hadn't inquired about the state of her love life. She had asked just about everything else, after all. The pair then agreed to El taking the bottom bunk and Jenny the top, so they made their beds before looking at the clock and realizing that the residence orientation was about to start.

"Shit! Orientation is about to start!" *I'm supposed to meet Mike!*

"Oh, true, let's get moving! We can stick together, yeah?" Asked Jenny.

"Sure, let's just go!" They rushed outside to the grass in front of the building where there was already a large group of people. What was going to happen was that all the new residents of the building were going to participate in some icebreaking and group bonding activities for a few hours before going back to the dorm for dinner and movie night. It was meant to be fun and exciting, but again El was feeling nervous. She couldn't see Mike, which was weird because he was so tall he could usually be spotted pretty easily, but at least she had Jenny with her. For a few minutes, all El did was look for Mike in the crowd, but then one of the leaders started talking and her attention was diverted.

"All right, people! Here's what's gonna happen: for the next fifteen or twenty minutes I want you to walk around and talk to some new people! Maybe make some new friends! After that we're going to play a game! Go!" Immediately the crowd buzzed. Jenny was excited, and for the first ten or so minutes she dragged El around behind her as she greeted a bunch of random people.

"Hi, I'm Jenny and this is my friend El!" And El would awkwardly wave from behind her. She mostly remained silent, scanning the people around her to see if she could see Mike anywhere.

Where ARE you? I don't see you anywhere.

I'm everywhere! I'm walking around with my roommate.

So am I, ha. She's pretty nice.

Suddenly Jenny interrupted her thought-conversation. "El! Look!"

She looked in the general direction Jenny was pointing out. "What?"

"Don't you see that guy? He's cute as fuck, oh my god."

El furrowed her brows. "What guy?"

Jenny huffed. "That one! Can you not see him? He's so tall he looks like a giraffe!"

A girl in front of them moved and El could now see who Jenny was talking about. *The irony!* It was Mike. El's face was taken up by a sly grin. "Oh yeah, he's definitely cute. You wanna go talk to him?"

***MY ROOMMATE JUST SAW YOU AND SHE THINKS YOU'RE CUTE
OH MY GOD I'M TRYING NOT TO LAUGH.***

Seriously? Where are you guys?

Like, to your left? Come over here and flirt with me but pretend you don't know me, it'll be funny.

Coming!

She saw him turn around looking for them, then his face light up when he spotted her. Immediately he tried to school his features into a sort of flirty face, what he liked to call a "smoulder" (which she thought was ridiculous but also hilarious). As he made his way over, Jenny started hyperventilating.

"Oh my god, he's coming this way! Do you think he's gonna talk to

us?!"

El said nothing, allowing Mike to approach with his stupid expression that was making it very hard for her not to laugh.

"Why, hello ladies! Such beauty graces my eyes. Your names?"

This *had* to be it. How was she not laughing at him? "Jane, but call me El."

He smirked but she knew it was a cover-up for the laugh that was bubbling in his throat. "And you?" He asked Jenny.

"Genevieve- Jenny!" She squeaked. She looked like she was about to faint. It was getting increasingly difficult for El not to laugh. She herself could quickly admit that Mike was very handsome, but she didn't see why this was causing Jenny to freak out so much. Maybe she was just always like that. Either way, it was the funniest thing El had seen since the day Dustin asked Max to prom.

"Such beauties, the two of you!" He grabbed El's hand and kissed it, followed by a wink. "Dearest Miss El, would you care to ditch movie night and go on a date with me? I saw a cute little diner on my way in."

She knew which diner he was talking about, as she had been the one to point it out earlier. They'd agreed that they'd have to go there sometime.

She pretended to be shocked. "Um, sure? Where should I meet you?"

Mike winked again. "Dorm foyer, 6 o'clock. See ya, sweets. Nice to meet you, Jenny!" And then he walked away.

It took all of El's willpower not to burst out laughing at the look on Jenny's face after Mike left.

"What- who- how?! *How* on *Earth* did you just get a date with the cutest guy I've seen all day?! It's like he knew we were talking about him when he came over here! Are you actually gonna go out with him?!"

"Of course! I said yes, didn't I? He'll be sad if I don't show up."

Once the activities were over, everyone went back to their rooms to freshen up a bit before dinner. El however, was "getting ready" for her date. Jenny had gone out into the common room about half an hour before to let El get ready, and when she came back to find her roommate looking exactly the same, she freaked out.

"You can't go on a date in those clothes! He's gonna think you don't care enough to even get dressed up! Also, it's your first date! You always have to look your best on your first date!"

Actually it's a much higher number than that...

El sighed. "He won't mind, I know his type. Watch, I'm gonna have a great time and I'll tell you all about it as soon as I get back, okay?"

Jenny pouted, having wanted to see her new friend all spiffed up. "Fine, I guess. But if he turns out to be a douche just come straight back, alright?"

El nodded. Jenny started to speak again. "So, I was just in the common room and I was talking to this guy-"

"Was he cute?"

"Not as cute as your guy, but cute enough. Anyway, so we were talking about interesting stuff that happened today and I told him about Giraffe Boy asking you out and stuff-"

"Giraffe Boy?"

"Yeah, 'cause he's so tall? So we were talking about that and he said they live in the same hallway and he's talked to him! Said his name's Mike. I didn't realize when he asked you out that he didn't tell us his name. This guy also said that Mike's from Indiana! Isn't that cool? You guys are from the same place!"

El smiled a secretive smile. "Yeah. That's cool. So listen, I should go, it's almost 6. I'll see you when I get back, okay?"

"Okay! Have fun!"

At the diner, El and Mike gorged themselves on greasy burgers and fries, sharing a vanilla milkshake.

"Mm, this is good but not as good as the ones they have at the ice cream shop back home," remarked Mike after taking a sip.

"Burgers are better though," answered El after swallowing a bite. "Goddamn delicious."

"So how's Jenny? Did you tell her it was a joke or does she still think I'm a random boy who just asked you on a date?" Asked Mike, smiling.

"Hah, she still thinks you're a rando. She said she talked to some guy from your floor and she found out you're from Indiana and your name is Mike. I'm like, thanks Jenny, for the information about my boyfriend whom I have dated for the past four years."

"Well, give her some credit, she doesn't know I'm your boyfriend! Now what was this about her saying I'm cute?"

El threw a fry at him. "I tell you you're cute all the time, why do you need to know what she said? Am I not enough for you?!" She exclaimed.

Mike defended himself. "I'm just a poor boy, don't hurt me! I need validation! You tell me I'm cute but then you turn around and say I'm ridiculous!"

El popped a handful of fries into her mouth, chewing thoughtfully. "Basically, she pointed someone out and was like 'oh my god that guy is cute as fuck!' And I didn't see who she was talking about but then someone moved and I saw it was you so then I had to tell you."

"This is the best joke, honestly."

"A + + quality. We should win an Oscar for our efforts."

When they were arriving at El's floor, Mike remembered. "Hey, don't forget to tell me how she reacts when you tell her the truth. I bet it'll be funny!"

"I promise I'll tell you, if only for the sake of my own sanity because I *know* you'll bug me until I do. Now good night! Begone!"

"Love you."

They parted with a kiss and then Mike made his way up the stairs. Jenny was waiting excitedly on El's bed when she walked in.

"So how did it go? Did you guys kiss?" El gave her a knowing look. "Oh my god, you did! How was it? Is he a good kisser?"

El decided now was the time. "Well I couldn't exactly tell you, he's the only boy I've ever kissed so I don't really know if he's good since I haven't had experience with anyone else."

Jenny screeched, falling back on the bed. "That was your first kiss?! I can't deal with this right now! This is too cute!"

She's not getting it... "Definitely not my first kiss, Jenny. I'm 18, give me some credit, jeez," she said, hanging her jacket over the chair at the desk.

Jenny's face was overtaken by a confused expression. "Then what...?"

El snorted. "It was a joke! If you can take our jokes you're ready to be friends with us, trust me. It's almost like a rite of passage."

"I'm *really* confused."

Giggling, El sat herself down in the chair facing Jenny. "Remember how you told me Mike's from Indiana?"

"Yeah..."

"We're from the same town, we grew up together. He's my boyfriend."

Jenny shot up off the bed. "WHAT?! You guys tricked me?!"

El nodded. "Told you, it was a joke. I thought it was funny that of all people you thought *he* was cute so I got him to come over and flirt with me pretending he didn't know me."

"Okay, thanks for showing me I'm gullible as fuck. Or maybe you guys are just really good actors. Either way though..."

"I think this'll be something we laugh about for a long time."

They laughed for a second, but then Jenny realized something. "Wait, how did you get him to come over and do all that? Is he a mind reader or something?"

"More like I am and he just goes with it. But that, dearest Jenny, is a story for another day."

15. Chapter 15

Hey peeps here is the beautiful chapter O! Tried out something new... writing the future! As in *our* future, so there's no mentions of any kinds of tech cuz idk what'll have happened by 2041 lol ANYWAYS here are some pics for reference

the snow ball pic i'm referring to is the one on the left: [/joe_keery/status/925755984873652224](#)

the one where they're dressed "punk" is the second pic featured in this article: [/articles/stranger-things-nylon-guys-september-cover](#) and i know it's fairly recent so pretend that's what they dressed as in their senior year of high school lol pls

the others are just these sort of images i have in my head so you can imagine those however you like :)

pls enjoy and leave me comments! they make my day and motivate me to write faster! thank you all again for reading, it means a lot to me :)

edit: holy shit i just figured out how to put the line there omg this is gr8

O is for Oh, Where The Years Have Gone

January 2041, Indianapolis, IN

"Hey, El?" Her eyes snap open. She had almost fallen asleep by the fireplace *again!*

"Yeah?" In front of her stands her husband. He is holding a box and smiling at her. He is always smiling at her. It's the cutest thing.

"Look what I found in the back of the hall closet!" He holds out the box.

"Why were you going through the hall closet?" She asks suspiciously. Mike rolls his eyes.

"I don't have anything better to do with my time, I never have. I was a stay-at-home dad, remember?"

"And now you have no kids to look after. Sad." He shoves her arm lightly and eases himself onto the sofa next to her. Taking the box, she pries off the lid and is pleasantly surprised to find it stuffed near full with photographs. "Oh wow..." She says, fishing one right off the top. "Is this... us at the Snow Ball?"

Thirteen-year-old Mike looks very unhappy at having his picture taken, while she is looking at him with an awkward expression. "Who took this?"

Mike peers at it. "I don't know, I feel like it was Nancy indirectly through Jonathan, or maybe he took it and she gave it to us? It was too long ago, I don't remember."

She shakes her head, mind blown. "It was, what, sixty-odd years ago? Jeez, it feels like it was last month."

"Fifty-six, actually. That feels weird to say, I'm not that old!"

"Your birthday is in two months and you're turning seventy. Face it, you're old!"

He hesitates for a second before answering with "I know you are but what am I?" Sadly, Mike's years as the king of sass have come to an end.

"... that was the lamest thing I have ever heard you say in the entirety of our forty-seven years of marriage. Not even kidding."

"I take offence to that."

"Sometimes the truth hurts," she retorts, taking out another photo. This one is of Dustin on what she thinks is prom day. "Oh god, I forgot Dustin had a mullet back then!" She shrieks, recoiling but then bringing the picture up to her face for a closer inspection.

Mike bursts out laughing. Soon the pair find themselves in tears, unable to stop the hysteria. He manages to calm down enough to breathe, but then he looks at the photo again and breaks into fresh

giggles. The sight of an elderly man giggling is not something El thought she would ever need, but it turns out that her husband giggling is just that sort of thing.

The next picture they look at is one of the boys the year they decided to dress "punk" for Halloween. It was the reason Dustin had stuck with the mullet through their senior year of high school. Mike cringes when he sees himself. "Remind me why we thought that was a good idea?"

El laughs. "I thought you looked great! All of you, but you especially. And didn't Jonathan use the pictures he took for something he was working on? He can't have thought you guys looked bad either."

He purses his lips. "I look like Bender."

"Bender was hot, I don't know what you're complaining about," she answers. "And then this led to you having a thing for black leather jackets for the rest of your life, which is great because I find that incredibly appealing."

Mike snatches the photo from her and hides it behind his back. "Moving on!"

It soon becomes an all-out war to see who can find worse pictures of the other. They are acting like children and they both know it, but they embrace it. It's been a long time since they could just be completely carefree like they are now.

"Oh, look-"

"No, this one-"

"Jesus-"

"Who let that *happen*-"

"Christ-"

Until suddenly El stops when she comes across a picture that makes her heart feel like it's about to burst. It's Hopper and Mike and herself. Mike is looking at her with the same expression he always

has when he looks at her, and she is looking at the camera. Hopper is glaring at the side of Mike's head, but she knows it's just pretend. She flips it over and sees that on the back it says: *1989. Last night before heading off to college. Hop doesn't hate Mike as much as he pretends he does.* She doesn't remember who took the photo, or who wrote on the back, but she thinks that the writing looks like Joyce's.

"Look at this."

Mike looks. "I remember that night," he says wistfully. "I was always terrified of Hopper, yknow? But then he pulled me aside at one point and he said, 'listen kid, don't get in over your head, but I'm glad she has you lookin' out for her. If anyone comes close to being worthy of her, it's you' and then he walked away. I was kind of like, in shock," he adds. "I didn't think he liked me."

"He loved you. He loved all of us, even if he didn't show it very well." She lays her head on Mike's shoulder, sighing. "I miss him. A lot."

He rubs her arm. "I know. I even miss *my* dad sometimes and he was shit."

"Yeah. Do you remember what he said to you at our wedding?"

"Hopper or my dad?"

"Hop."

"Something like 'be good to her or I'll break your arms'?"

She laughs, shaking her head. "Classic Dad."

Mike furrows his brows, looking down into the near-empty box and then at all the reminders of their life together strewn around them. "Does it feel weird to you? Seeing all these pictures and remembering everything?"

El looks at him, frowning. "I guess, it kind of feels like I haven't lived this long. It *is* weird."

"Now we have grandkids and everything," he says, looking at the latest Christmas photo propped on the mantel above the fireplace,

their beautiful family smiling back at them.

"Time with you always goes fast. But it's been worth every second," she says as she shrugs.

He smiles again and is about to say something in return when the doorbell rings. Getting up to answer it, he turns to see her looking at a photo someone took of the party when they were around fourteen. They have all grown and separated eventually, but will always be bound by something stronger than blood because sometimes a found family is better than a related family. Time has been kind to them, letting them live in peace and prosperity. He misses them, especially Lucas who is the only one not still with them. Mike thinks it's amazing to have all these pictures and be able to say that he was there for almost all those moments. He's proud of the life he's lived. At the door is no one important, so he goes back to his wife, who is now starting to clear up the photos that are all over the floor. Finding the first one she had pulled out (the one of them at the Snow Ball) and then snatching the frame on the mantel, he pokes her side, causing her to look up.

"Look how far we've come," he says, holding the two side-by-side.

She grins. "That's a long way."

"But we did it, together. Just like we promised."

"Just like we promised."

He thinks that might be the greatest feat of them all.

16. Chapter 16

Hello my peeps what is up I Hope You Enjoy This Chapter,, basically my cousin told me to listen to this song a while ago and i finally did today and i realized how FREAKING MILEVEN IT IS SO HERE YOU GO

edit: guys if you comment, leave me some truths and dares cuz im not very creative when it comes to those

P is for Perfect

April 2017, Indianapolis, IN

I found a love for me

Darling just dive right in

And follow my lead

The notes floated over from the radio and Mike already knew that he would like this song. He tended to like slow songs because he was a complete and utter sap, which his friends always teased him about but he never changed because El liked it. He'd clearly benefited from being such a romantic, seeing as she was still around after all this time.

Well I found a girl beautiful and sweet

I never knew you were the someone waiting for me

'Cause we were just kids when we fell in love

Not knowing what it was

"Hey, Vi, can you turn the volume up?" He asked his daughter. She was sitting at the kitchen island attempting to draw something for her art class while her father cooked dinner. Without looking up, Vienna directed some force at the radio and the volume rose.

"Thanks."

I will not give you up this time

But darling, just kiss me slow, your heart is all I own

And in your eyes you're holding mine

Dicing onions was already making him tear up, so he was going to have to blame it entirely on that. The song itself was pretty-sounding, but the lyrics...

Baby, I'm dancing in the dark with you between my arms

Barefoot on the grass, listening to our favorite song

When you said you looked a mess, I whispered underneath my breath

But you heard it, darling, you look perfect tonight

God, who wrote this? It was beautiful.

Well I found a woman, stronger than anyone I know

She shares my dreams, I hope that someday I'll share her home

I found a love, to carry more than just my secrets

To carry love, to carry children of our own

It was just so... accurate.

We are still kids, but we're so in love

Fighting against all odds

I know we'll be alright this time

They *had* been kids when they fell in love, and at heart they still were. If asked, Henry and Vienna would tell you that their parents looked at each other like kids who'd been told Christmas came early. It was truly heartwarming.

Darling, just hold my hand

Be my girl, I'll be your man

I see my future in your eyes

Dumping the diced onion into the olive oil at the bottom of the pot, Mike turned to the sink to wash his hands so he could wipe his eyes. Sometimes his emotions got the best of him, and this was one of those times. He'd definitely improved on it as he grew older, but there was still the rare occurrence where he became a little overwhelmed. Gah, he just really loved her and the song was saying exactly everything he'd ever felt about her, it was impossible not to cry even a little bit.

Baby, I'm dancing in the dark, with you between my arms

Barefoot on the grass, listening to our favorite song

When I saw you in that dress, looking so beautiful

I don't deserve this, darling, you look perfect tonight

This was his new favourite song. He was definitely telling El all about it as soon as she got home.

Baby, I'm dancing in the dark, with you between my arms

Barefoot on the grass, listening to our favorite song

I have faith in what I see

She was probably the only thing Mike had faith in one hundred percent of the time, if he were to be honest.

Now I know I have met an angel in person

And she looks perfect

I don't deserve this

You look perfect tonight

He thought he really didn't deserve her or her love, but she'd chosen to spend her life with him so he had decided to make the best of it

and treat her with all the kindness and patience and love he had to offer.

"Dad, are you crying?" *Shit.*

"Hmm, what? No. Why would I be crying?"

Mike could feel Vienna's eyes on his back as he picked up the lump of defrosted ground beef, put it in the pot, and began stabbing it with the wooden spoon to separate it into chunks.

"*Dad,*" she groaned exasperatedly.

"...okay, maybe a little bit." Suddenly she was next to him, peering into the pot.

"I don't think it was the onions, either," she said, grinning. "Was it the song?"

The radio was playing some other song now, something about rocking and babies. Mike felt his face get hot. It was absolutely *not* fair that his own kid was able to make him feel so embarrassed. It was an absolute disgrace, but the sudden redness of her father's complexion confirmed the girl's suspicions.

"Aww, that's so cute, Dad! I bet you were thinking about Mom, right?"

Suddenly he wasn't so embarrassed, seeing her enthusiasm. He ruffled Vienna's hair with his free hand, saying, "Of course I was, kiddo, who else would it have been?"

She smiled wider. "You guys are so cute," she answered, retreating back to the island to continue her drawing.

For a few minutes, all that could be heard was pencil scribbling on paper and meat sizzling in the pot on the stove, since Vienna had turned off the radio as per Mike's request. That was until there was an odd thump from upstairs. Vienna immediately shot off up the staircase to see what had happened, and it took all of three seconds for her laugh to echo down to the lower floor.

"Is everything okay up there?" Asked Mike, a smile taking over his face as he stirred the meat around.

Vienna's face appeared at the top of the landing. "He fell over trying to put his pants on!" She shrieked, peals of laughter coming after her statement.

"Shut *up*, Vienna!"

Henry's face joined his sister's at the landing, reddening in embarrassment or irritation, Mike wasn't sure which. "Dad, can you tell her to stop, please?"

Vienna continued laughing, breaking into fresh giggles every time she remembered the image of her brother lying in the bathroom doorway with his pants around his ankles.

"Why did you even have your pants off in the first place?"

He looked away, flushing even more. "I was gonna shower, but then I realized I forgot to get a towel and I, um- I tripped trying to pull my pants up." He scowled as Mike joined Vienna. "It's not even funny! You guys are so mean, where's Mom when you need her?!"

At that moment, the lock on the side door opened and El walked in. "Did someone say Mom?" She asked, smiling as she headed over to her husband. "Hey," she said, leaning in to kiss him quickly.

"Hey," he answered, eyes sparkling.

"HEY!" Yelled Henry. "Can you guys stop being cute for one second and defend me against this monster?!"

Mike rolled his eyes. "You're seventeen and you can't hold your own against your twelve-year-old sister? Go shower, buddy."

The boy harrumphed and walked away. El watched him leave before turning to Mike. "What was that about?" She asked, eyebrows rising.

He turned back to the pot to cover it. "He tripped on his pants and Vi wouldn't stop laughing. A usual day in the Wheeler household," he said, shrugging. "How was your day? Vi, come help set the table!"

Said girl came rushing down from the landing where she had been watching her parents, snatching her drawing from the island to show them.

"Mom, look!" It was a half-done recreation of a picture of the family a few years ago where little Vienna had just smacked her brother so he was glaring at her while their parents smiled at each other over the kids' heads.

"That's beautiful, honey! Our kids are so talented, Mike," said El, walking away to leave her purse on the hall table.

"Just like their mama." He grinned.

She turned around, hands on her hips. "I would think that the creativity comes from you, but okay." Mike watched her levitate plates out of the cupboard onto the table as he got the cutlery out of the drawer. Nowadays she just used her abilities to do mundane things, like setting the table. If it ever came to such a situation, El could and would use them for defence, but luckily fate had seemed to leave their rag-tag family alone after their teenage years were over. It was always nice to see her calm and happy.

"My day was pretty boring, actually," she said abruptly. "No new cases right now, so I wasn't needed outside the office and you know how I feel about the office."

"Mmm." He said noncommittally.

"But then I come home to my three kids laughing and it makes up for everything."

"I am not your kid!"

"You're literally a child in a man's body, Michael," she retorted dryly. "Now how was your day?"

He was about to answer when Vienna interrupted. "He cried at a song on the radio like fifteen minutes ago."

El's eyebrows rose and her lips quirked up into a half-smile as she tried to hold in a laugh. "Did he now?"

Mike turned red again. "Yeah, it- it made me think of you, and it was really nice. And I was cutting onions, okay! That didn't help either," he grumbled.

"That's so cute though, Mom, that he was thinking of you! Isn't it?"

El glanced at their daughter, who had four cups floating around her head. She had been going to set them on the table but had gotten distracted by the opportunity to shame her easily-mortified dad. "Hey, if you think that's cute you should hear how he proposed to me!"

"You've never told me about that!"

Mike ignored the girls in favour of the beef in the pot, going back to the stove to stir it again. When he turned around, they were both staring at him. "What?" They did this sometimes, the pair of them. They would stare at him without moving just long enough to make him uncomfortable. "Stop that! Is today Make Fun of Mike Day or something?"

They broke the stare when Vienna started giggling. "You should show her the song, Dad. It's called Perfect and it's by Ed Sheeran. I'm gonna go see if Henry's done yet." With that she skipped up the stairs to bother the only other person in the house. *Little shit*, thought Mike.

"She's a little shit, but she's our little shit," said El, coming up to him and wrapping her arms around his waist.

"Yeah, she is," he sighed, laying his head on top of hers.

"Can I hear the song?"

Mike grabbed his phone off the island and typed the title and artist into YouTube, slipping it into the dock and switching the function on the radio before pressing play on the screen. For the duration of the song, the pair swayed on the spot in their kitchen, eyes closed and absorbing the other's presence. When it was over, El looked up at him, eyes sparkling with tears.

"I love you so much," she said, shaking her head and letting out a watery laugh. "And I'm the luckiest woman alive to have you, I hope

you know that." She hid her face in his shirt. "We really *were* kids when we fell in love, it's weird. You know how many weird looks I get when people ask and I say we've been together since we were fourteen?"

He smiled at the top of her head. "It's special."

They were still standing in the same spot holding each other when there came two successive screams from the upper floor, followed by a loud thump and laughter.

"I SWEAR TO GOD!"

17. Chapter 17

warning: this chapter is a little weird lol

they're drunk and el has absolutely no qualms whatsoever about revealing her boyfriend's secrets

edit: I'm sorry to anyone who tried to read this before but it has been brought to my attention that fanfiction did something to it and it was full of codes, hopefully it's fixed now!

Q is for Questions

April 1989, Hawkins, IN

"I dare you to do four cartwheels in a row!" Max was giggling against the couch as Will got up to do her bidding.

It had started out as a simple night with friends, but had quickly deteriorated into this mess. Mike wasn't sure who had brought the alcohol, but he thought it might have been Dustin (something about Steve?). It was a good thing his parents wouldn't be home for a while. His dad was off in Florida at some big conference or something, and his mom was... somewhere. Mike wasn't sure, but he thought maybe she was in Indianapolis visiting someone? He couldn't remember properly. All he knew was that Holly was at a friend's birthday/slumber party and that he was to pick her up tomorrow.

But that didn't matter now, as he was jolted back to earth by the sound of Will crashing against the staircase and thumping to the floor. "Boo!" Yelled Max. "That was only two!"

"Fuck you, Mayfield," he grumbled.

The group broke out into crazed laughter at the sight of a crumpled Will at the foot of the stairs.

"That's my job, Byers!" Said Dustin.

"Eww!" Exclaimed El, leaning against Mike's arm. Her weight and warmth were sort of grounding, since Mike kind of felt like he was

about to float away.

Dustin rounded on her. "You say that like you and Mike don't do it too!"

She raised one eyebrow, trying to wiggle it and failing. "It's not fucking, it's *making love*," she said in a stage whisper before breaking into more giggles.

Lucas groaned and rolled his eyes. "You are all *disgusting*." He said, flopping back onto the couch cushions. He was the only one on it, but he seemed to have forgotten that he was bigger than it and so smacked his head on the armrest quite uncomfortably, causing the group to laugh again. Everything is funnier when you're drunk.

Will sat down again. "Okay, Dustin, truth or dare?"

Dustin pondered for a moment. "Truth!"

"What was your most terrible romantic encounter?"

He grimaced. "When I tried to ask Stacey to dance at the Snow Ball in eighth grade."

Mike wrinkled his nose. "Why did you ask *her* to dance? That's so gross, dude."

"It is not!"

Max took a sip from her cup and then shrieked. They all turned to stare at her in shock, but then she started laughing, face turning even ruddier than it already was. "Move on, fuckers!"

Dustin pulled her hair a little bit before turning to El. "El, truth or dare?"

She smirked. "Dare." El liked dares. They were usually fun and didn't involve telling everyone your deepest, darkest, secrets. Not that she minded sharing things with her friends, but dares just seemed more fun anyway.

"I dare you to... hmmm... I dare you to make out with Mike for five

whole minutes and not break any of the lights!"

El pouted. "Dustiiiiiiin! You know how hard it is for me to do that," she pleaded.

He looked away from her. "Nope, you're doing it."

She made an angry noise before moving to straddle her boyfriend and pressing him back against the side of the couch. Dustin had picked something like this because everyone knew that for some reason, any time the two were in a situation similar to this one, El almost always blew out at least one light.

The first time they'd really gotten into it had also been in the Wheelers' basement while there were no adults around. The rest of the party had just moved upstairs to set up a movie and make popcorn a few minutes before the power went out unexpectedly. At that they had rushed back into the basement looking for flashlights only to find Mike and El on the sofa, so tangled that you couldn't tell where one of them ended and the other started. The pair hadn't even noticed that the lights were out until a yell from Dustin forced them apart with a jump.

After that incident, these things had become a source of embarrassment, so Dustin thought that it was a great idea because that was the whole point of truth or dare, right? Also, it was more likely than not that El *would* blow out a light, which would mean she lost and Dustin got to go again.

Unfortunately for him, she managed not to blow any lights or turn the power off, and after five minutes pulled back from Mike looking thoroughly kissed and very smug about it, indeed.

"Lucas, truth or dare?"

Said boy was still clutching his head, even after almost ten minutes. "Um, truth? My head hurts too much for a dare."

"When was the most-" She giggled a little bit, "when was the most inappropriate time you farted?"

Lucas bemoaned his misfortune. "Ugh, god, probably when my dad

was giving me The Talk. He was in the middle of talking about condoms and being safe and shit and I just- I just farted. It was so fucking awkward!"

The group laughed again, Will somehow finding it the funniest thing he'd ever heard. He was literally rolling around on the floor with tears streaming down his cheeks, howling. Lucas sent a half-hearted glare his way. "It's not that funny, Will."

Will didn't stop, and maybe it was the alcohol, but he really felt like he couldn't. He just kept imagining Lucas' dad giving him The Talk and Lucas farting in the middle of it, and the laughter kept coming.

"Fine, if you're gonna keep laughing, I dare you to kiss the person here you find most attractive!"

Will was silenced. Lucas hadn't had to ask because as soon as Will knew there would be drinking he said that he would only do dares. Will knew he always admitted the stupidest things when he was drunk, and he would rather avoid it if he could. "What?"

Lucas glared. "Everyone closes their eyes except you, and you have to kiss the person you find most attractive here. No one's gonna know except you and that person."

Max clapped her hands. "That's such a good dare, Lukey!"

"Don't call me that. Erica calls me that and I fucking *hate* it."

Max still thought it was the best dare they'd had all night, and she excitedly covered her eyes. About twenty seconds later she felt Will lean back beside her. "Done."

"Who'd you kiss?!" She exclaimed.

Will side-eyed her. "Not telling."

She looked around the circle, trying to see if anyone looked different. Mike was very pink in the face, but he tended to get like that when he drank too much, and also he'd just been heavily kissing his girlfriend two minutes before, so Max wrote it off. Lucas was looking smug and Dustin was staring at the side of her face. El was

contemplating the ceiling with a very concentrated look.

Max grunted. "You all look the *same*, I can't figure it out!"

"That's because you're not supposed to," said Will. "Mike, truth or dare?"

Mike's eyes shot to Will before opening his mouth tentatively. "Truth?"

"What's the meanest you've ever been to someone who didn't deserve it?"

Mike looked at El for a second before his gaze traveled to the ceiling too. "Max, when we first met her. I'm still sorry about that, by the way," he answered.

Max sighed. "No biggie, Wheeler."

"El, truth or dare?"

El decided she was too tired for a dare right now, and also Mike's embrace was warm and she didn't feel like getting up. "Truth."

"Who's the sexiest person here?" Mike smiled devilishly, expecting her to say him, but the smile was thrown off-kilter when she answered.

"Me."

Dustin let out a loud "HAH!" before everyone started laughing again, Mike joining in after considering the fact that she was, actually, correct. Once the last chuckles had been silenced, El spoke. "Max, truth or dare?"

"Dare!"

"I dare you to switch clothes with Dustin for the next three rounds!"

For Max it was fine, she was used to stealing Dustin's clothes, but since Max was so much smaller than him Dustin looked ridiculous in hers. It made anyone who sent a cursory glance his way start to laugh.

"Dustin, truth or dare?"

"Dare," he sighed, taking a sip from the cup he was holding.

Max's eyes sparkled. "I dare you to call Domino's and ask for pizza with beef only on the left."

As he got up to do just that, the group following, Mike noticed him eyeing El. Dustin looked like he was formulating a plan, and that would probably cause disaster. Sober Dustin *usually* had pretty good plans, but Drunk Dustin was another story.

After another round of boisterous laughter around the phone upstairs when the Domino's guy told Dustin to kindly go fuck himself, the group was once again seated in a circle on the basement carpet, Lucas joining them from the couch.

"Mileven, truth or dare?"

Mike made a face. "Stop calling us that."

El patted his head softly. "I like it, it's cute."

He shook his head. "And you can't ask two people!"

"Nowhere in the rules does it say you can't ask two people!" Dustin retorted. "Let me use my paddles for I am curious."

Max snorted. Lucas was staring at Will, who in turn was staring at Dustin, who was staring at the couple in front of him, waiting for an answer.

They looked at each other. "Truth," they said together.

Dustin grinned like that was exactly what he'd wanted, because it was. "What's something the other wouldn't want the rest of us to know?"

El contemplated some facts for a second before deciding that contemplation was too much work if you didn't have coffee and said the first thing that came to mind. "He likes to have his hair pulled."

Mike choked, spitting out whatever was in his cup. "El!" Will started laughing again, joined by Max and then a wide-eyed Dustin. Lucas looked like he would rather be anywhere but there.

"Are you telling me that-" Max paused, her face getting redder by the second, "that Wheeler has a hair-pulling kink?"

"What's a kink?"

"Oh my god, I can't fucking *breathe*!"

Even though he was drunk, Mike still had some grasp on embarrassment and he could have sworn that his face was catching fire at that moment. He spluttered but ultimately said nothing regarding El's statement, his brain being unable to come up with a suitable defence. Instead he just answered the question, saying, "Max is her favourite other than me. And I'm not explaining what a kink is right now, it's not gonna make- not- not gonna make any sense and I hope we forget all of this anyway."

Dustin and Will wiped their eyes. "Aw man, that was more than I expected!"

Mike glared and Lucas let out a loud snore. They all turned to look at him. "We haven't even been playing for that long!" Exclaimed Will.

Dustin shook his head. "Alcohol makes him grumpy and sleepy after a while. Shit, maybe we should sleep too."

"Don't you have to pick up Holly tomorrow?" Max nodded her head at Mike.

"I do?"

"I think?"

El yawned, suddenly tucked out. "You do."

"Okay, maybe we should sleep."

"Good night guys," said Will, already laying down.

"Good night."

In the morning, Mike woke with a start to see Dustin hovering above him with a shit-eating grin on his face. "What the hell?" He groaned, rubbing his head. He could feel his pulse in his goddamn *eyes*, for fuck's sake. Mike vowed never to drink again.

"I wanted to see what would happen if I pulled your hair."

"Oh, *fuck* you, Dustin!"

"In the name of science!"

18. Chapter 18

Yo so it's 4:25 am rn but it's the weekend so idgaf

but then my laptop is at 4% lol

this one came to me pretty easily and I know it's short but it's sweet, I hope? I think I got what their dynamic would be like but idk, please lemme know! Byers-Hopper family happiness is what we all need! A very small bit of dad!Hopper if you squint

also lol duetting total eclipse of the heart is something I do with one of my brothers except he doesn't usually join me as easily as Will joined El

hope you enjoyed!

R is for Rolling!

July 1988, Gary, IN

The scene was set. Hopper the Dad was by the grill, tending to the meat, and Joyce the Mom was setting the table. Will the Wise and El the Brave were running around on the grass, carefree and waving sparklers around. Jonathan the Professional Photographer was attending to his calling, having just picked up the JVC to start filming. A radio was playing in the background, but it was barely audible over the din the family was making.

"It's the fourth of July!" Screeched El, jumping on Will's back and punching the air.

"That looks good, Hop," remarked Jonathan from behind the camera, zooming in on the hot dogs and burgers grilling over the fire.

"Get that thing out of my face," answered Hopper gruffly, waving his tongue in front of him.

Jonathan chuckled and moved the focus to his mom, who was about to set down the last plate but used it to cover her face instead. "Oh, Jonathan! Stop filming me!" She laughed. "You don't need my ugly

mug in the video."

"You look great, Mom," he protested.

She smiled and set the plate down. "If you say so."

Turning, Jonathan yelled, "What day is it?!"

"The fourth of July!" Screamed his siblings.

"And where are we?!"

"Gary, Indiana!" Said El.

"On the shore of the beautiful Lake Michigan!" Added Will.

"Who's excited for the fireworks tonight?!" Sang Joyce.

"We are!"

Hopper rolled his eyes. After a few minutes of recording Will and El's shenanigans (which consisted of falling a lot and running around with what seemed to be an endless supply of lit sparklers threatening to burn off each other's hair), Hopper called out that dinner was ready. Jonathan was about to shut off the camera to save battery for a later recording of the firework show when suddenly the radio went louder than it should have and his sister screeched from behind him.

"Will! It's the song!"

Oh god, sighed Jonathan internally.

"TURN AROUND!"

"EVERY NOW AND THEN I GET A LITTLE BIT LONELY AND YOU'RE NEVER COMIN ROUND!"

"TURN AROUND!"

"EVERY NOW AND THEN I GET A LITTLE BIT TIRED OF LISTENING TO THE SOUND OF MY TEARS!"

"TURN AROUND!"

Joyce laughed a little as Will and El danced around yelling the lyrics of Total Eclipse of the Heart at each other, Hopper shaking his head and putting hot dogs into buns on the side of the grill.

"TURN AROUND, BRIGHT EYES!"

"EVERY NOW AND THEN I FALL APART! AND I NEED YOU NOW TONIGHT! AND I NEED YOU MORE THAN EVER!"

"El, Will," interrupted Jonathan, "I'm pretty sure it's a romantic song! You guys are brother and sister!" He said the same thing every time they did this, and every time they had the same response.

"I try but Mike doesn't sing it with me!"

"And I don't have anyone to sing to!"

At least this once, Jonathan had it caught on video. It would probably come in handy for blackmail purposes at some point. All's fair in love and war after all, and if there was one thing the three siblings did it was love each other.

But war happened sometimes too.

Like the time Will had caught his sister making out with his best friend on the kitchen counter when he'd expressly *told* them he was going to be working in there. Instead he'd walked in on them and promptly walked out, yelling about how one day he was going to drown them both in bleach.

Or the time Jonathan had promised not to steal any of Will's popcorn but El saw him do just that and didn't speak to him for an entire day (or at least until Will explained that it was okay).

It was an interesting family, theirs.

"FOREVER'S GONNA START TONIGHT!"

"ONCE UPON A TIME I WAS FALLING IN LOVE, NOW I'M ONLY FALLING APART! NOTHING I CAN SAY, A TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE HEART!"

As the song came to a close, the radio went back to its previous volume and the two giggling teenagers sat down at the little table in front of the cottage they'd rented for the few days they would be at the lake. Joyce slid two hot dogs in front of each of them and told them to help themselves to condiments.

Watching his brother and sister pile on the ketchup and mayonnaise respectively, Jonathan felt a rush of warmth and affection. He felt it quite often when around his family so it wasn't like it was out of the ordinary, but he was still always surprised by it when it happened. He loved his siblings a lot. Sometimes he thought it was weird. Will had been his brother for most of his life, but it was crazy how fiercely Jonathan had come to love El in the few years he'd known her. She was really only officially their sister since two years ago, but it felt like she'd been there all their lives too.

Later, as the three sat on the sand by the water after the show, Joyce and Hopper having gone for a walk, El sighed. Jonathan looked over at her.

"I wish Mike was here," she said wistfully. "He loves fireworks."

Will nodded. "Yeah, but he's in Louisiana with his family. And I'm sure they have lots of fireworks down there, I know for Mardi Gras at least New Orleans has some crazy celebrations," he reminded her.

She leaned her head on his shoulder and looked at the sky. "We have crazy celebrations too."

"You bet!"

"Yeah, like you two and that stupid song," grumbled Jonathan. El talking about Mike had reminded him of Nancy. Their family had a propensity for falling in love with Wheelers, it seemed.

"What was that, Jon?" Asked El sweetly.

"Yeah, what was that, Jon?" Repeated Will, turning to mockingly glare at his brother.

Jonathan rolled his eyes. "I said, like you two and that stupid song," he retorted.

Suddenly, a wave that shouldn't have been able to reach him crashed over Jonathan, soaking him head to toe.

"You know what, never mind," he said.

El smirked. "That's what I thought."

Will high-fived her.

"Disgusting..."

This time he noticed the water getting dangerously close. "Nope, I'm leaving! Bye!"

It was a small consolation that he got to hear them laugh as he ran.

19. Chapter 19

Yo peeps! So I lied, I told someone this chapter was gonna be Mileven fluff but then I wrote this instead \(. _ .)/

chapter T is being posted directly after this since it's done too haha

also a note: I am such a big shipper that my cousin literally got me a custom sweater that says Mileven on the back for my birthday I'm not even kidding and it's my new favourite article of clothing

anyways hope you enjoy this double update!

S is for She's Here

November 1984, Hawkins, IN

He thinks he's going to die. No, scratch that- he knows he's going to die. There are God knows how many of those dogs converging on the house right now, as he stands there holding a fucking candlestick.

A candlestick.

How pathetic. His sister has a gun, for fuck's sake! What the hell did he think he was going to do with a candlestick anyway? *Guess it's better than nothing*, he thinks belatedly.

He can hear the monsters outside, growling and clicking and making those noises he associates with death, now. First El, then Bob...

Maybe I'll see them again.

It's something to think about in these last moments. He believes he's made his peace with death, this year. Losing Will, then getting him back but losing El... bullies only getting worse... his mom falling apart... *Nancy* falling apart. She might have thought she was hiding it but he knew there was no way she was taking Barb's death any better than he was taking El's disappearance. He often wondered if Nancy knew about the quarry, the handful of times he'd gone there and stared over the edge but ultimately gone home; or about the reason he'd only worn long sleeved shirts since the first day the temperatures

had dipped below 60. It had been the toughest year.

The last week had been a whirlwind, finding Will frozen on the field that day had just barely been the start. He'd felt weird the entire day, then they'd lost Dart thanks to *Max*, and when he was in the gym with her he had felt like there was some kind of weird energy pulsing through the room. Then Max fell. He felt like maybe *she* was there, because that would explain a lot of things, but when he looked there was no one.

He feels like maybe that was the catalyst to this strange week. After that, Will had radioed but when they got to the washroom by Salerno's he was gone and Dustin was being suspicious. He panicked and ran, *this can't be happening, what if Dart really is a demogorgon and took Will back to the Upside Down, nonononono*

Mrs. Byers took Will away and he went home, but the next day when Will didn't show up at school and no one answered his calls, he took it upon himself to go to Will's house. That's when the weird shit finally came to light, he thinks. Will was seeing shit, some kind of weird monster from the Upside Down that wasn't the Demogorgon but worse. Then he drew all the shit that went up on the walls, the shit that is *still* on the walls, he notes. It freaked him out, because all he wanted was to be able to help his friend but it really seemed like he couldn't, and it was turning out just like last year, all this bad shit was happening but he was just a kid and he didn't know what to do-

He doesn't register the monsters going silent outside, but he definitely notices when one of them smashes through the window. Everyone whips around, aiming their weapons, or in his case, holding it up ready to throw. Even though his aim is terrible and he's well aware of it. Hopper steps forward, holding his gun out.

"Holy shit," says Dustin, looking on in shock.

"Is it dead?" Asks Max, grimacing. Her hand grips Lucas'.

Hopper prods it with his foot, but it doesn't bite his leg off. It's dead.

Again, everyone whips around, this time to the door. They all hear it, the creak of the front porch. Something is coming, something that's

probably hungry for blood. It's got to be whatever killed the monster on the floor behind him, and he doesn't care if he dies, at this point. But he hopes no else has to. Except whatever killed the demodog can most certainly kill them all too.

He sees the lock slide on its own, and for a second he lets himself think *-El-* but then he remembers when Will told him about the night he'd gone missing and how the Demogorgon had done just this exact thing. He's bracing himself for what's coming as the door opens, but then he sees it's a person and then he sees Hopper lower his gun and then he sees that it's a girl.

It's *her*.

And suddenly he cares a whole fucking lot about whether he dies or not, he wants to be here because she's here and this is the best moment of his life and *god*, is it really her? He feels that weird energy again, and he knows that he was right, she *was* there on that day in the gym. It's pulling him to her, and it's almost like everything is passing in slow motion as he walks forward.

He takes in a shaky breath, staring. She stares back, like she's drinking his face in. A smile stretches its way across, and he really feels it because his face hasn't made a genuine smile in a long while.

"Eleven?" He breathes.

"Mike."

20. Chapter 20

Yo wassup peeps I've decided to jump on the bandwagon and write a gc, I've been reading a shit ton of them in the IT fandom and I absolutely love these but there aren't many for ST :(still, this is with all those OCs from Chapter K- if you remember, it was Christmas at the Wheelers' with all those random kids, also this is set in present day,,, meaning alex will soon graduate college, Jordan is on her way, henry/elora are hs seniors, phil/ryan just started their first year of uni, sab/ayla are hs juniors

continuing this note, OCs Henry and Sabrina are inserts (henr00d is my friend and sab is my cousin) so the way they text is me trying to be true to how they actually text but also moving this bullshit forward lol

also I know it's december now but I set this chapter during when uoft (which is where I go and coincidentally so does phil haha) was having reading week which is just a week of no classes for everyone except engineering students lollllll

ok additional note: there are supposed to be 'at' symbols in front of the usernames when someone else is calling them out (like when QOB says "AleXXX MichaelB this isn't fair" there are supposed to be 'at' symbols in front of those but it won't let me put them in)

MichaelB- Jordan (Max's daughter)

AleXXX- Alex (Dustin's oldest)

Philliam- Phil (one of Will's twins)

RyHigh- Ryan (the other twin)

Henr00d- Henry (the next gen of That Wheeler Boy)

SatanClaus- Elora (a goddess, also ^^his bff)

QueenofBadassism- Sabrina (Dustin's middle child)

Ayyyyylmao- Ayla (Jancy bby)

T is for Texting

The Fam

Thursday Nov 9 2017 3:34 PM

MichaelB- SUP FUCKERS

MichaelB- GUESS WHO I FOUND

MichaelB- []

SatanClaus- nice

QueenofBadassism- why do u get to see my bro and I don't

QueenofBadassism- AleXXX MichaelB this isn't fair

MichaelB- its cuz he loves me more than u

AleXXX- shut up

AleXXX- QueenofBadassism I miss you too sis but college :/

QueenofBadassism- but then how is Jordan there

MichaelB- magic bitch

AleXXX- I thought I told you to shut up

AleXXX- begone THOT

AleXXX removed MichaelB.

AleXXX- she's here bc she doesn't have classes this week and took it upon herself to come bother me

SatanClaus- u can't just remove her like that she's my favourite
AleXXX

AleXXX- I thought Henry was your favourite?

SatanClaus- SHUT

SatanClaus- he doesn't need to know

QueenofBadassism- I see

SatanClaus- just for that I'm adding her back

SatanClaus added MichaelB.

MichaelB- YASSS

MichaelB- fuck u alex

AleXXX- you really are satan aren't you

SatanClaus- my user is not inaccurate

QueenofBadassism- jordan u hoe

QueenofBadassism- gtg tho

AleXXX- tell mom and Lucia hi QueenofBadassism

QueenofBadassism- come back to chicago and do it urself

MichaelB- wheres henjagger

MichaelB- oh wait thats not his name anymore

MichaelB- where r u Henr00d

SatanClaus- he has the chat muted when he's busy

MichaelB- that little whore

MichaelB- Henr00d u slut how dare u mute us

SatanClaus- calm

SatanClaus- i'm w him he's practicing

MichaelB- practicing what

AleXXX- probably getting extra prepared auditions start in december

SatanClaus- yes alex

SatanClaus- its his final year, he has to be really good and get the lead part so he can go to Juilliard like he always wanted to

MichaelB- :) proud of my son

AleXXX- jordan you just called him a whore and a slut like 2 seconds ago

MichaelB- just bc he's my son doesn't mean he's not a whore

SatanClaus- why r u both on ur phones if ur together

SatanClaus- enjoy urselves

MichaelB- tru

MichaelB- ttyl

5:23 PM

Henr00d- I AM NOT A WHORE.

Henr00d- I AM AN ACTOR.

SatanClaus- whats the difference tho

Henr00d- I stg el I will hurt you

SatanClaus- u wont tho

Henr00d- you right

8:16 PM

RyHigh- hwat the fukc you guys

RyHigh- I've been in class all day

RyHigh- literally till 8 I just got back to my dorm

RyHigh- this chat has been dead for like a week and I suddenly come

back to 51 notifications

Philliam- ha thats what you get for going to ryerson

Philliam- uoft is having reading week rn

RyHigh- engineers don't even get reading week

RyHigh- you fuckin engineer lol

Philliam- fuckin artscis i stg you dont even go here ry why do you know that

RyHigh- I have my sources

Philliam- you also have a deprecating name for your university as your user but ok

Henr00d- shady

Philliam- wheres your girlfriend

Henr00d- wtf

Philliam- SatanClaus

Henr00d- she's not my gf

SatanClaus- iv e been summoned from m y .sle e b

SatanClaus- stop denying our relationship Henr00d

Philliam- ya Henry stop denying your relationship

Henr00d- i cant deny something that doesn't exist

Philliam- ouch

SatanClaus- im hurt

Henr00d- that was the point

Henr00d- so hows college Philliam

Henr00d- you and Ryan are both in toronto right

Philliam- ye

Philliam- idk where tf he went actually he was just here

RyHigh- im still here just can't think of anything productive to add to this

SatanClaus- there is nothing productive abt this chat d00d

SatanClaus- the real question is wheres Ayla I miss her

SatanClaus- she's a bean and I love her

Henr00d- probably busy

Henr00d- bc she's a normal human with a life unlike the rest of us

Philliam- also nyc is p cool if I lived there I would never be home tbh

RyHigh- you were never home at home anyway

Henr00d- well Montreal's p cool too from the one time we visited you guys

Philliam- Indianapolis bores me

Philliam- except for indy500 thats cool

Philliam- even Hawkins is more interesting

SatanClaus- thats offensive

SatanClaus- u only like Hawkins bc of all the supernatural shit that used to happen

RyHigh- our pop was literally kidnapped and possessed in two consecutive years philliam

RyHigh- I dont understand your fascination with it

Philliam- its just cool! Aunt Ellie is literally telekinetic!

Henr00d- so am I dipshit

Henr00d- and so is my sister

Philliam- I will not stand for this abuse

SatanClaus- *gunshot*

SatanClaus- THIS IS WHY MOM DOESNT FUCKING LOVE U

Philliam- best

Philliam- im so sad that vine died

RyHigh- rip vine

Henr00d- NO EL LETS DO MY FAVE

Henr00d- one moment Obama

SatanClaus- hey get us the las ag na

Henr00d- mMmMMM las Ag NA

Philliam- omfg I've never seen that one

RyHigh- you know what

SatanClaus- im about to say it

Henr00d- I dont CARE that you broke your elbow

Philliam- something came in the mail today

SatanClaus- DEEZ NUTS

RyHigh- hA GOT EEEEEEM

MichaelB- I LOVE SHEEP

RyHigh-

Henr00d- wtf jj

SatanClaus- whoever threw that paper ur moms a hoe

Philliam- YESS

SatanClaus- now its time for my fave Henr00d

RyHigh- oh no

Henr00d- calling people daddy is gross

SatanClaus- STOP KINKSHAMING ME

Henr00d- kinkshaming is mY KiNK

SatanClaus- AAAAAAAAAAAAAA

RyHigh- thats a good one

RyHigh- but nothing beats this one

Philliam- it is Wednesday my dudes

RyHigh- it is Wednesday my dudes

RyHigh- wtf phil you dick it was my turn

Philliam- uuuuuuuuuUUUUUUUUUUU

MichaelB- UwU whats this?

Henr00d- It's Thursday.

Henr00d- again wtf jj

SatanClaus- SHIT

SatanClaus- SHES A FURRY

SatanClaus changed MichaelB's nickname to SheepFucker.

SheepFucker- I've been exposed

AleXXX- sorry she's drunk guys

Philliam- at 8:40? Damn girl

Henr00d- philliam your attempts are futile

QueenOfBadassism- u r all hoes

Henr00d- hey sabs

QueenOfBadassism- HENRYYYY

QueenOfBadassism- blondy

Philliam- wtf since when is he blonde

SatanClaus- hes not she just always calls him that

SatanClaus- leave the poor girl alone Philliam

QueenOfBadassism- ya leave me alone unless u want a repeat of christmas 2008

Philliam- goD plEaSE nO

Henr00d- savage.

SatanClaus- wait what happened christmas 2008

RyHigh- phil told sab that Santa was actually just one of our uncles dressed up and she cut his bangs off in the middle of the night

Henr00d- it was legendary! I stg I told you about that as soon as school started up again

SatanClaus- probably just forgot third grade was a long time ago

Henr00d- tru

Ayyyyylmao- lol i have the vaguest memory of that

Ayyyyylmao- didnt she do it w safety scissors

SatanClaus- AYLA

SatanClaus- mY GODDESS

Philliam- Ayyyyylmao please don't remind me

Ayyyyylmao- MY WIFE

SatanClaus- YASS

RyHigh- lol Henr00d

Henr00d- \$tøð exposing me

QueenOfBadassism- hehe we know the truth

Henr00d- StOP

SatanClaus- wtf do they know that I don't this is an offence

Henr00d- -.-

RyHigh- im gonna go sleep

RyHigh- night fam

Henr00d- good riddance you traitor

QueenOfBadassism- weaklings all of u

Ayyyyylmao- shut up ur an hour behind everyone else

QueenOfBadassism- um actually sweetheart

QueenOfBadassism- Alex and jordan r 2 hours behind me so

SatanClaus- stay in Chicago young one

SatanClaus- a good city

QueenOfBadassism- lol no chicago is shady af

QueenOfBadassism- alex sorta remembers Seattle thats why he went back to Washington even tho our parents moved here before I was even born

Henr00d- FuCK THIS IM MOVING TO FLORIDA

Ayyyyyylmao- ?

Henr00d- indianapolis is cold I want to cry

Henr00d- I just went to put the trash out and I cant feel my fingers I was literally outside for less than a minute

SatanClaus- uve lived here ur entire life and ur just figuring out that its cold

SatanClaus- wow

Henr00d- shut up

SatanClaus- no

Ayyyyyylmao- #ship

Henr00d- AYLA

Ayyyyyylmao- thats my name

Ayyyyyylmao- shit moms calling

Ayyyyyylmao- bye

QueenOfBadassism- ;)

Henr00d- I swear I will literally kill you the next time I see you

QueenOfBadassism- :(

SatanClaus- wheres philliam

Henr00d- who cares

QueenOfBadassism- probs fell asleep on his homework again

QueenOfBadassism- the life of an engineer

Henr00d- glad im in theatre

SatanClaus- nerd

QueenOfBadassism- u love him tho

SatanClaus- I do tho

Henr00d- :)

Henr00d- saB DONt

QueenOfBadassism- #ship

QueenOfBadassism- oops

Henr00d- ...

Henr00d- OH MY GOD

Henr00d- im leaving

SatanClaus- bye bitch

SatanClaus- I should go too tho

SatanClaus- ttyl sabs

QueenOfBadassism- wow

QueenOfBadassism- u really r all hoes

QueenOfBadassism- leave me here like that

QueenOfBadassism- k wow

QueenOfBadassism- guess ill just die then

21. Chapter 21

lol why do i always write in the middle of the night this can't be healthy but at least i decided to sleep before posting haha

i've been wanting to write something like this for like two weeks now so here it is

in either the next chapter or the one after it there will be introduction of a new character, however he is not an OC ;) any guesses as to who that might be?

hope you enjoy and had/have a wonderful holiday season, whether you celebrated Hanukkah or will be celebrating Christmas or Kwanzaa or anything else! Love, hugs, and kisses from your dearest mother on the internet lol

U is for Understanding, Or A Lack Thereof

May 1989, Hawkins, IN

He should have known. He should have fucking known this wasn't going to work.

"You've been blowing me off," she says, calmly, but Mike knows that is the furthest thing from what she's actually feeling right now. "And now I see you've been with her," El adds, nodding her head at the swiftly departing Jennifer Hayes, who had sensed the tension and wanted no part in what was coming.

Mike sighs. "Jesus Christ, El, it's really not what it looks like."

She glares. "That's bullshit."

Suddenly he feels angry too. What the fuck is she doubting his faithfulness for? He's never been anything but loyal! He supposes it does look suspicious that he's been blowing off his girlfriend for Jennifer Hayes, but he has a reason for that and he thought she would have been able to trust him enough to leave it. He doesn't think he's ever given her a reason *not* to trust him...

He scoffs. "What, you don't trust me?"

She keeps glaring and doesn't answer, which is answer enough. Mike throws his arms in the air, huffing, and stalks around her to the other side of his car, which she had been leaning against when he exited the school. He tries to open the door but finds that it's locked, even though he just unlocked it.

"Are you fucking kidding me right now?" He asks.

"No, I'm fucking mad at you right now," she fires back.

He does not have time for this. If he's not home soon his mom will kill him, he already stayed late enough planning with Jennifer.

"Oh, really, that's nice!" He bites. "I'm not sure what for, exactly, since I don't see anything I did wrong, but-"

"Oh, you don't? You don't? That's real nice, Mike, real nice. Cancelling on me last minute when I was supposed to go to yours to study? Skipping lunch, which I have with only you, so leaving me to sit by myself? Avoiding me in the hall between classes? And now I see you stayed after school with *Jennifer*," El spits.

He rolls his eyes exasperatedly, which only serves to make her angrier but that's why he did it in the first place. "I said I was sorry, what more do you want? There's a reason!" He tugs on the doorhandle again but it still doesn't open.

"Yeah, I'm not good enough for you anymore? Is that why you're with Jennifer now? Come senior year suddenly every girl in our grade seems to have realized how *fucking cute* you are and *you* decide I'm not it anymore?"

Mike is dumbfounded, his brain going a mile a minute. She thinks...?
"You think I'm cheating on you? With *Jennifer*?"

She gives him a hard stare from across the hood. "You haven't denied it."

"Of course I haven't, I didn't think there'd be a reason to deny anything!"

El takes this the wrong way. "So you are then."

"This is fucking ridiculous."

"No, you're fucking ridiculous! You act all shady and distant, then you come out of school late with Jennifer Hayes of all people, and now you don't deny cheating on me when I ask!" She slams a fist down on the hood.

"I'm not denying it because there's nothing to deny! Why the fuck would I cheat on you?" He roars.

"I don't know, you tell me! You're the one doing it!"

Mike is about to blow his top, he can feel it. He needs to leave. But the door is still locked. "Can you please open this fucking door," he says, through gritted teeth.

"Not until you tell me what the fuck is going on."

"I can't! There is a reason and you will find out if you just leave it alone."

El walks around the front of the car and stands face-to-face with Mike (more like face-to-shoulder, but she's looking at his face and she sees her rage mirrored back at her).

"Were they all lies? All those times you said you loved me, were any of them true? Or was it just because I was the only girl who actually liked you until this year and you liked that? Huh?"

"Fuck you," he says quietly. It's the only thing he can muster before he starts yelling again. "Are you seriously doubting how I feel about you? Have I not made it clear enough? Everything I ever do is for you, and now you get mad at me because you-"

"Because I what, Mike? Because I *what*?"

"Because you don't fucking believe me when I tell you I'm not messing around with anyone else behind your back! Like, what the fuck?! When have I ever given you reasons not to trust me?"

She crosses her arms. His anger is radiating onto her and it's making her worse because she doesn't think he has a right to be angry. "These past two weeks you've given me plenty. Friends don't lie, Mike. And neither do boyfriends."

"Yeah, well someone who's happy in their relationship doesn't refuse to believe their boyfriend when he says he's not cheating!"

"Well, maybe I'm not then!"

"Well, maybe we shouldn't date then!"

This gives her pause and she takes a step back, away from him. "What?"

His nostrils flare. "You are not listening to me right now and you're not going to listen to me anytime soon." He pulls the doorhandle. "And this door is still locked."

Mike starts to walk away, hoisting his backpack higher over his shoulder. "Where are you going?" Calls El.

He whirls around, still angry. "*You're* not gonna open the door and I need to go home before my mom kills me. I'll come back for the car when you're not being such a bitch."

They don't speak for a week.

It's about to reach a breaking point because their friends are getting tired of the pair communicating only in icy glares and stony silences, but as of yet no one has brought it up to the group. Will had, of course, confronted Mike the day after the fight, asking why in the fuck El came home angrier than a bull who'd just seen red and all she said was "Mike" with such venom it was scary. Mike had shrugged his best friend off with a "ask her what the fuck's wrong with her". Will hadn't said anything after that.

The breaking point doesn't come when their friends are around though, it comes a week later when Mike is pulling out of the parking lot after everyone else has left and sees her walking, head down, pathetically trying to shield herself with her backpack because it had started pouring during last period. He thought she'd have gone home

with Max or Will or something. He feels terrible, because she usually would've been riding with him but instead she's getting soaked (and if he's honest with himself, he's been feeling like shit all week because even though they're fighting he still misses her and he's fucking sorry).

He honks as he passes, and then stops a few feet further down the street. El comes to a stop beside the passenger side door, and he can see her staring into the car in confusion, but then she opens the door and gets in.

"Thanks," she says shortly, then turns away from him. They drive in silence, so Mike definitely notices when she starts shivering. At the next red light, he leans into the backseat and grabs one of the hideous sweaters his mom forces him to wear in the fall which he keeps there for this very purpose and tosses it onto El.

"You're shivering." He says in response to her unvoiced question. He keeps driving without looking at her even though he can feel her stare on the side of his face.

The tension in the car is palpable and at an all-time high when they reach her house. He cuts the engine and stares out the windshield. El is picking at some lint on the cuff of the sweater. Mike decides he's not going to deal with this bullshit any longer, because this is by far the stupidest thing they've ever done and he's tired of it. He takes a breath and turns to her but it whooshes out of him and his resolve breaks when she looks into his eyes. But then they both lean over the stick shift and suddenly they're making out.

"I'm so sorry," he says between kisses, "I was such a dick."

She presses a lingering kiss to his lips and then leans away. "I'm sorry too. I was a bitch."

"I shouldn't have called you that." He shakes his head.

"It was true, though."

"Okay, but I still shouldn't have said it, and I'm sorry."

"Are we gonna argue about this too?"

Mike lets out a laugh. "I hope not. I hate arguing with you."

"Me too."

She kisses him again, leaving a hand on the side of his face when she pulls back. "I love you and I'm sorry I didn't believe you, that was stupid. I just..." She looks down. "You were acting weird," she whispers.

He sighs. "I know I was, and I still can't tell you why but you'll find out soon, okay? But I promise I'm not doing anything with anyone besides you. There's no one else I'd rather do stuff like this with," he says as he pushes a piece of her sopping hair behind her ear and kisses her cheek.

El nods, dropping her hand into her lap. "I know, I just- you were acting unlike yourself and I guess I'm scared of people not wanting me anymore, you know?"

"I know, but you never have to worry about that with me. I will always want you, no matter what happens."

"Okay."

He smiles at that, but then scowls when he remembers how stupid he was. "But I mean, I didn't have to be such a dick to you, Jesus Christ. I should have explained myself better."

She shakes her head, smiling back even though his is gone. "It's hard to be reasonable when you're angry."

"I'm still sorry, though."

"Me too."

"So are we good now?" Mike grins when she nods. "Good, 'cause I wanted to ask if you wanted to go get a shake with me?"

El laughs. "I would, but I'm soaked."

"Go change, I'll wait."

She shakes her head. "Someone's in loooooooooove," she teases.

"Yeah, it's you," he quips.

"Ooooooh!"

He leans out the window as she makes a run for it across the street, getting his hair all wet, and yells, "But you better bet I'm as whipped as your milkshake will be!"

22. Chapter 22

I wanted to post chapter z yesterday bc it takes place on Christmas Day so it would've been wildly appropriate, but alas v-y are not yet complete (or well now just w-y). This chappy takes place at the same time as chapter R (which if you recall is the fourth of July with the Byers-Hoppers) where Will says that Mike is in Louisiana. Well here is Mike in Louisiana, and with him comes a new character! Shoutout to my cousin and my brother for checking it out to make sure my characterization was acceptable bc I was kinda nervous about writing this guy probs bc I love him so much and didn't want to write him badly. I hope you guys agree that he's ok, haha

Anyway so this one was supposed to be mostly fluff but then it got away from me and this happened. If there's anything that seems wrong or is offensive please tell me and I will take it out!

also this was posted on ao3 yesterday morning but fanfiction wasn't letting me post :/

V is for Vacation

July 1988, New Orleans, LA

Mike really hadn't wanted to come on this trip, but here he was in New Orleans. Even after all the begging and trying to convince his mother to let him stay in Hawkins, he was still here. Nancy had gotten out of it because she didn't live with them anymore and their parents couldn't force her to come. *Lucky*, he thought. Instead, he'd been forced to sit next to a cranky Holly on a plane for two and a half hours, and now he was going to be spending the fourth of July with a bunch of family members he barely knew.

At least it wasn't his dad's side of the family, because they were all just like him: stuffy and indifferent. Sure, there were more cousins on that side, but they were boring and it wasn't like they actually liked Mike anyway. Unfortunately, his mom's side only had one cousin, and he was five years younger. Other than that, Mike would only be seeing his grandparents, aunt and uncle, and then a few great-aunts

who would surely pinch his cheeks and call him cute.

Suffice it to say, he was not looking forward to it.

Upon arrival at his grandparents' on the outskirts of the city, Mike was greeted first by an elderly woman (he assumed her to be of some relation to him) who smelled like canned soup.

"Oh, Michael, you're all grown up!" She said, throwing her arms around him. "And mighty handsome too," she added, trying to wink and failing. It was making Mike sweat.

She furrowed her brows. "Do you know who I am?"

He scratched his neck awkwardly, looking over the top of her fluffy head to see his mom hugging it out with his gran. "Uh, no, I'm not sure. It's been a while since we've visited."

She threw her head back, cackling. *Oh Jesus, is this what the next two weeks are gonna be like?* "I knew you before you were even born! I'm Elvira, your momma's favourite aunt. Don't tell her I told you that," Elvira quipped, trying to wink again.

God help me. "Um, o-okay. Nice to see you again, I should go say hi to Gran."

Before he could, though, Mike was interrupted by three more great-aunts, who all said the same thing as Elvira. From the lone great-uncle he met he got a "the last time I saw you, you were this small" and a "so are there any girls you like?" Which, yeah, one he loved with his entire being, but he didn't particularly feel like getting into that with the old man he'd met half a minute before.

Finally, he was able to reach his Gran. She was really the only person he'd been looking forward to seeing. The few memories he had of her were all warm and fuzzy and bright, and they always smelled like lemon cake (which was much more appetizing than canned soup). She gave him the biggest hug and the brightest smile.

"I can't believe how big you are! How's school?"

He fielded a few questions from her for a few minutes before she sent

him off upstairs, saying, "You're sharing with your cousin, first door on the right of the landing. He's already up there."

Passing through the living room on his way to the stairs, Mike spotted his Aunt Maggie leaning against the wall looking very out of it. He thought she might have been drunk, but couldn't say for sure. He was kind of nervous about his cousin, though he knew he probably shouldn't be since the kid was like, five years younger than him. But they hadn't seen each other since Mike was about eight, putting the kid at three. He probably didn't even remember Mike. All he remembered himself was a small boy with messy black hair much like his own.

He let himself into the room Gran had indicated, walking in on what seemed to be an argument with the walls.

"-can't believe they made me come to this bullshit, can you believe this? I can't! Those fuckers-"

The kid whirled around when he heard the door creak, staring at Mike. "Who the fuck are you?"

Mike was taken aback. *Isn't he like, twelve? The fuck is all this swearing?* "I'm Mike. Your cousin? Gran said I was staying in here with you. Why the fuck do you look exactly like me?"

His cousin gave him an appraising look. "Richie Tozier at your service," he said, doing an over exaggerated bow. "Now the real question is, why the fuck do you look like a nerdier version of me? What the fuck did I do to this universe to have my doppelgänger look so *uncool*."

"Excuse you, I'm plenty cool!"

"So you say, señor!" *What the hell is that accent?*

Mike asked just that. Richie seemed affronted. "It's my Pancho Vanilla Voice! You fucker, can't you tell?"

"Uh, no," Mike laughed, dragging his bag over to the bed that wasn't messed up. "That was pathetic."

"You're pathetic. Have you seen yourself today?"

"Sure, kid."

Richie let out a very loud sigh and flopped down on top of Mike's bed, lying across it and spreading his arms and legs out so Mike couldn't sit. "Did your parents make you come to this shit too? I wanted to stay at home but they wouldn't let me. Motherfuckers," he grumbled under his breath.

Mike raised his eyebrows. "Yeah, I wanted to stay at home too. Do you kiss your mother with that mouth?"

"No, but I'll kiss yours!" Richie slapped his knee and started laughing maniacally, as if what he'd just said was tremendously funny. "Trashmouth Gets Off A Good One!"

"Jesus Christ, you're like if someone mixed me and Dustin drunk and high..." *This is the next two weeks, Mike. Get used to it.*

Later that night, after dinner had been eaten and everyone was turning in for the night, Mike was about to turn off the lamp between their beds when his cousin turned over, blinking owlishly with eyes magnified by his thick glasses.

"Hey, Mickey Moose?"

Mike snorted. "Don't call me that."

Richie grinned. "Sure thing, Mikey-Wikey. Am I gonna be as tall as you?"

He thought for a moment. "Probably? I mean, we are related. But my dad's taller than yours so I don't know."

"You sure we're related? I mean, I'm not sure, with that face of yours, you know?"

"Oh, fuck off, you wastoid. You look like me, you're calling yourself ugly too."

"Never said I was otherwise."

Mike spluttered for a second. "Why'd you even ask? Is it your dream to be the awkwardest person on this planet? Because sorry to break it to you, but that'll be me till I die."

Richie moved his head in a way that Mike assumed was meant to be shaking it, then took off his glasses and put them on the bedside table. "I just wanted to imagine how much taller than Eds I'll be and how mad that's gonna make him," he answered, turning back over. "Night, Mike Donald's."

"Night, Richinald."

On the night of the fourth, after fireworks and talking to El for a while, Mike was sitting alone by the fire in the backyard, roasting a marshmallow. Everyone had gone to bed. He was looking up at the stars and contemplating his life when he felt a sharp pain in his side.

"What the *hell*?" He yelped, reaching down to rub the affected area and glaring at the cackling kid next to him. Richie was holding the twig Mike had seen him sharpening all afternoon. "Have you been sharpening that all day with the sole intention of poking me with it?"

Richie had on a shit-eating grin. "That was the express purpose, my dearest Michael."

Mike sighed and blew on the marshmallow he'd just removed from the fire. "I thought you went to bed. What do you want?" His cousin plopped down on the log next to him and laid his head in Mike's lap. Mike promptly shoved Richie off, popping his perfectly toasted blob of sugar into his mouth.

Straightening his hideous Hawaiian shirt, Richie sat back up. "Sleep is for the weak, and I have some questions."

"Such as?"

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

Mike was confused. The past few days had been filled with nothing but Richie being an annoying little shit, why was he suddenly interested in Mike's personal life? *Probably so he can use it to keep being an annoying little shit.* "Why?"

"Because I don't know if any fucking girl in her right mind could ever *choose* to date you."

Mike sighed again, stabbing his marshmallow stick into the ground. "Are you asking this because you think I'm the ugliest fucking thing you've ever seen and now you're worried about your chances?" He said, looking at the other boy from beneath his fringe.

Richie hummed, pursing his lips in mock-thought. "Mm, you're not so bad on the eyes," he answered, then snorted, knowing he had achieved his goal of making Mike feel awkward. "Nah, the ladies are all over me anyway," he added.

"I'm sure," said Mike sarcastically. "Then why are you asking?"

He was silent for a moment. "...just curious."

Mike looked at the sky, silently asking whatever deities existed out there to not let Richie make this exchange too inappropriate, just like he had all the others. "I do. Have a girlfriend, I mean," he added, seeing the look of confusion on the kid's face.

"She nice?"

At this, Mike couldn't help but smile. Thinking of El, in whatever capacity, always made him happy. "The best. She's sweet, and kind, and hilarious, but she's also *such* a badass."

"How long have you dated?"

"Three years this fall."

Richie whistled. "That's a long time for teenagers."

"I guess." Mike could see him looking at the fire with a kind of wistful expression on his face, the flames reflecting off the lenses of his glasses so Mike couldn't really see his eyes.

"Do you guys fight a lot? Or just argue, or whatever?"

"Not really. We kind of just always know what the other is thinking, and it's usually the same thing. We get along really well. Doesn't

mean we don't fight *ever*, though. It's just rare."

"Oh..." He seemed a little disappointed, like he had some kind of inner turmoil going on that he'd hoped could be resolved by Mike's answer, but that had just been stirred up even more. "How'd you know you liked her?" Richie asked.

Mike stuck his stick back in the dying flames, sifting the burning wood around. "It was almost right after meeting her, to be honest. She was- in a bad situation, to say the least. My friends and I found her in the woods in the middle of a storm," he laughed, realizing at that moment how ridiculous it had really been. "We took her back to my house and I tried to take care of her for a week, and then she disappeared and was gone for a year. It was one of the hardest things I've ever gone through."

Richie looked at him worriedly. "Are you- um- are you okay?" Mike hadn't noticed he was crying.

"Yeah, I'm fine. It's fine." He wiped his eyes quickly. "But back to your question, it was during that week that she stayed with me that I realized I liked her. I don't know how it happened, she just- made me smile, and feel all weird and fuzzy inside, I guess. I just wanted to be around her all the time. It was kinda weird that I liked her so much when I only knew her for a week."

He took a breath and continued. "I guess I felt like she understood me. And she was a distraction, kind of. From everything. Bullies at school, and my dad's kind of shitty- he doesn't hit me or anything, it's more like he doesn't care at all," Mike rushed, seeing the look on his cousin's face. "He seems like he's always disappointed in me. Like I'm the son he never wanted. I can't play any sports to save my life, and I'm not all that interested in politics or economics either, which is really the only stuff he likes. He wants me to be an accountant like him," he added in a disgusted tone.

"That's fucking boring." Richie cracked a smile.

"Exactly! Compare it to what I love doing, which is writing! My friends and I, we play this game called Dungeons and Dragons, and I've been the Dungeon Master since always. The DM is the one who

writes the campaigns and leads the characters through the story, and it's the most fun thing ever, except we haven't played in a long time. English has always been my best subject, too."

The younger boy looked at his feet. "At least you're not a queer."

Mike's breath left him all at once. "Is that what this is about? You worried you'll catch the gay if I have it?" He scathingly said.

"That's what my friend's mom says," responded Richie in a tiny voice. "I know she's fucking crazy but she scares me, 'cause what if she decides to lock him away forever or something? And- and my dad-" His voice broke and he hid his face in his hands.

Suddenly Mike felt quite rude for the way he'd spoken, since in front of his eyes was clearly a very scared kid. "Hey, hey- you don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. I know I've been kind of dismissive since we met, but you're still family and I care about you." He laid a hand on Richie's shoulder. "I'm not gonna make you talk about something that's clearly upsetting you if you don't wanna talk about it. Besides," he joked, "you've kinda grown on me, and if you're this annoying when you're happy then I don't wanna know how annoying you are when you're mad."

Richie sniffed. "I just- my dad's told me he'll kill me if he finds out I'm a *fucking fairy*," he said, muffled by his hands. "And he's beat me within an inch of my life for smaller things, so I wouldn't fucking put it past him."

Jesus. Mike had never gotten that vibe from Uncle Went, *but there you have it*, he thought. "Okay, so this is why you were asking then? You thought you might like someone and you wanted to make sure?"

"Yeah. My friend."

"You don't have any girl friends, right?"

Richie shook his head, slowly removing his red face from his hands. "But I like girls too! They're soft and they smell good, and they have nice hair. I just- don't have a crush on one right now. Does that make me gay?"

At that moment, Mike realized that this conversation had taken a turn into somewhere he hadn't particularly felt like going, but it seemed more and more like he was going anyway. He sighed. "No. Gay means you only like boys, just like straight means you only like girls. There's a word for liking both, and it's bisexual."

Richie stared. "I didn't know that existed."

Mike shrugged. "Neither did I, but I had this kind of talk with my sister a few years back. Kinda feels weird I'm talking about it to you now, but I guess you need to know. It's all okay, whatever sexuality you identify with, but it's up to you to figure out what that is. Just remember that whether you like boys, or both boys and girls, it's totally okay. It's perfectly normal, too. It just fucking sucks that most people can't understand that."

The kid's head flopped onto Mike's shoulder, and this time he didn't shake him off. "Thanks, Mike."

Looking at the glowing embers, Mike felt a sudden rush of courage. "If it makes you feel any better, I'm bi as fuck."

He looked down to see Richie's reaction, and saw that his eyes seemed to be larger than before, if that was even possible. "You are? Does your girlfriend know?"

"Yeah, Ellie knows," he chuckled. "She was the first one I told, after my sister."

"And she doesn't care?"

Mike shook his head. "She thinks it's great that her boyfriend understands what she means when she says a guy is hot."

"How did you know?"

At this, Mike blushed. "Like I said, it was after I talked to my sister. I was confused about a lot of things. But when I was younger, the bullies at school used to call me and my friend Will names, like fairy and- the other f-word. It sucked. Will's dad even called him that. It was just because we were really close, and we used to hold hands all the time, and hug whenever we'd leave school. He was my best

friend, and he still is, but- I guess I used to like him. I just never really wanted to acknowledge it because I was afraid of it."

"But now you're not."

"Well first of all, I don't like him anymore. I'm pretty sure El's got my heart forever, if I'm being honest. But second, I am. In certain ways. I don't think I'll ever not be afraid, because there'll always be people out there who won't agree with it. The difference is that I accept it, now. I don't care that there'll be people that don't agree, I just know when not to say or do certain things that might get me in trouble. Because frankly," Mike added, "I've had enough trouble for a lifetime and none of it had to do with me being bi."

Richie nodded. "Maybe I should pretend I have a cold and start calling you Michael. Bike for short!" He slapped his knee, suddenly back in a good mood. "That's chuckalicious!"

"What the fuck is wrong with you, child, I swear to god..."

Richie stood to his full height of four feet eleven inches, towering ominously over his cousin's hunched six foot three, until he jovially clapped his hand to Mike's shoulder.

"You coming to bed, Michael?"

Mike groaned. "Can you not call me that in front of anyone else please? They'll ask questions neither of us will want to answer."

"Sure, Bike."

"Goddammit."

By the end of the vacation, Richie had managed to make himself ever-present around Mike, asking him questions and telling him perverted jokes and speaking in weird accents that weren't very good, but when it was time to leave, Mike found that he was going to miss the kid after all. So he left his address and told Richie to write if he wanted to.

He got the odd thing in the mail every few weeks, usually some random note scrawled on a sheet of ripped out notebook paper, but

occasionally a full letter with lots of updates on life in Maine. Until June and then again in August, when he didn't get anything, which he thought was weird because if there was one thing Richie liked to do it was *talk*.

But then at the end of August, Mike's mother called him into the kitchen to tell him the Toziers were moving to Bloomington, something to do with some serial child killer on the loose making them worry for their son. *As if*, thought Mike. He had the niggling feeling that his cousin was messed up in something bigger than he was, just like Mike himself had been. They needed to talk again.

so there you have it. i ship reddie extensively, and to me richie is definitely bi. i think even in the book (which i finished a while ago) there are hints that he is. either way,,

i also hc mike is bi, idk i just really like that. byeler is the cutest friendship and i feel like if mileven wasn't my otp i would absolutely ship byeler instead

i feel that there may have been (or maybe even still is) something there, bc well,, you can have more than one crush at the same time also,, sadly,, IT 2017 richie has terrible parents,, i think by the time he's 12 he would have realized something was different about his feelings toward other boys and bc of the time period and his horrible parents he would be confused and scared

but then he feels that his cousin mike is trustworthy and maybe could help him figure some stuff out, so that's why this conversation happens

also,, if you liked him here i have plans for richie to come back haha pls let me know!

23. Chapter 23

lol i haven't updated since december 26 i'm sorryyyyyy

i went to ottawa for the new year so it DID set me back five days, but this chapter was also not really forthcoming for some reason,,,

updates on my schedule bc i started writing other stuff: i'm gonna finish this fic first bc it's nearly done, then i'm gonna write a follow-up chapter to Airport Ballrooms, and then i will continue with LSS bc i now have a full outline for it! yay for updates

hope you enjoy this chapter peeps! chapter z has been done since before christmas so i technically only have 2 chapters left of this how exciting

W is for Weightlessness

August 1986, Somewhere in Rowan County, IN

It was Dustin's idea. The party had been lying on the sand on the shore of Lake Jordan, soaking up the sun after soaking up a ton of water, and everyone was watching as Mike roasted his fair skin because he was too invested in his conversation with El to put on another layer of sunscreen after towelling off.

Dustin nudged Will. "Aren't they just wonderfully disgusting?"

Max, to Will's right, snorted. "Get over yourself, Henderson."

Will shook his head. "They're probably always gonna be like that."

Lucas rolled his eyes. "For once, I agree with Dustin. Imagine what they'd be like if we let them loose at a fair. Probably kiss at the top of the Ferris Wheel, that's how cheesy they are," he said.

Dustin's eyes widened. "Do you think El's ever been to a fair?"

They all stared. Dustin looked askance at his friends. "What? It's a valid question!"

Lucas scoffed. "*When* exactly would she ever have been to a fair? Did you forget she's lived most of her life locked in one building?"

Will winced. Dustin turned to the very distracted couple beside them (who were now lying down, El's arm thrown across Mike's abdomen as he loosely held her hand) and brought them out of their reverie.

"El, have you ever been to a fair?"

She shook her head but otherwise ignored him in favour of her boyfriend.

Dustin took it as his answer, grinning back at the others. "Well, that settles it. Guys, I know what we're doing this summer!"

"Dude, it's literally almost the end of summer."

"That's beside the point!" Turning back, he added, "Mike, I really think some goddamn sunscreen isn't gonna hurt you."

Needless to say, by the time they went home, Mike was as red as a lobster.

Afterwards, all it took was a little convincing Steve and a little convincing Hopper. Steve managed to borrow one of his dad's company vans so all the kids could fit in one vehicle, and on the morning of the trip everything was going smoothly.

Then they arrived at Dustin's house to pick him up.

Max had been early, appearing at Steve's house herself instead of waiting to be picked up, and then they had swung by the Byers-Hopper place and El and Will had been patiently standing on the front stoop. Mike and Lucas were sitting on the curb of the Maple Street cul-de-sac with their backpacks handy. Dustin, on the other hand, had barely slept all night with excitement for the next day, and so he was tired and missed his alarm in the morning. Luckily, his mother woke him before his friends got there, but then, being Dustin, he had started running around the house like a headless chicken, screaming "Son of a bitch!" because he couldn't find his water bottle.

At the moment, Steve was losing patience watching Dustin root

around in his garage. "HENDERSON!" He bellowed. "Get your ass in this van right now or we're leaving without you!"

All he got in response was another screeching "Son of a bitch!" and a loud clang as Dustin dropped a shovel on his foot.

Max leaned in to the window from the other front seat. "Dude, come on! We woke up early to avoid the interstate traffic but at this rate it's not fucking happening!"

Lucas and Will were sniggering in the middle, watching their friend as he got even more frantic after Max's words. She narrowed her eyes at them. "Alright, Stalker, why don't you go get him?" Looking to the very back of the van, she enunciated her next words very clearly. "Dickhead! Why don't you stop making out with El and help your dumb friends? Aren't you the unassigned leader?"

Steve laughed at the indignant look on the kid's face. "We're literally just holding hands, Max!"

El shook her head and got out of the van herself, the only one nice enough to go remove Dustin from the abyss of his own idiocy. He got into the van grumbling, because El had found his bottle before she even entered the garage, pointing it out on the table right where he'd left it when repairing his bike chain the week before.

"Alright, you little shits better behave because I am *not* crashing this van on the interstate." Pointing a finger at the young couple in the back, Steve added, "No funny business back there, either. I've got my eye on you, Hopper." El scrunched her nose in disdain as Mike turned to the window and Steve started the engine.

"For once, someone isn't targeting me," said Mike.

"That's because we all know you're too much of a pussy to try anything," answered Lucas.

Mike threw his arms up as everyone let out a snort. "Dude!"

"It's true! Dustin, back me up!"

By the time they got to the county fair a few towns over, Steve was

very close to ripping his perfectly styled hair right out of his head. The *entire* drive had been spent listening to the three boys in the back bickering, with Max sometimes interjecting to make things worse. Will had been mostly silent, at times just requesting a music change, and El hadn't said anything at all. At this point, they were the only ones Steve liked.

Pulling into a spot near the fairgrounds, Steve cut the engine and turned around again. "Okay, here's what's gonna happen: we're gonna go in together, and then you shitheads can split up or do whatever until noon, at which time we will all meet at the hot dog stand right at the entrance. There, you see it?" He pointed and they all nodded. "Good. Not a minute later, or I will assume you've been kidnapped or worse. Got it?" They nodded again. "Alright, move your asses."

As soon as they entered, Dustin and Lucas immediately began arguing about whether they should hit the roller coaster first or some of the other rides instead. Max was unhelpfully standing by and Steve had already walked off in the direction of the trees, where he knew there would be some shade and he could rest.

"Guys, guys!" Interrupted Will. "Maybe we should let El decide? We came here so she could go to a fair, right?"

"Yeah, Will's right," echoed Mike. "What do you think, El? The roller coaster or... other stuff first?" He looked like he was hoping for a specific answer.

El looked around at her friends and brother, seeing Dustin and Lucas' impatience and Will's encouraging smile. Max had run off back to the gate to grab a map of the grounds, something they had neglected to do when entering. El looked up at Mike. "Roller coaster?" His hand tightened on hers as Dustin pumped a fist in the air. "Mike?"

Mike swallowed as they started walking. "It's fine, I'm just- a little scared of roller coasters, is all."

"Why?"

"They're high and fast, and I'm kind of afraid of heights."

"You shouldn't be, your head's all the way up there and the rest of you is down here," quipped Max as she caught up to the group.

Mike groaned. "God, shut up, Max, I'm only 5'8."

She danced around him to join Will in the front. "Make me, Dickhead!"

El squeezed Mike's hand back while Will led the party in the direction of the roller coaster Dustin had chosen to bless her with (really he hadn't chosen anything, since the county fair midway only had one). "I still don't get why she calls you that."

Mike shook his head, looking over his friends with fondness. "It's just a nickname. Like how she calls Lucas 'stalker'. It's because of when we first met her. Lucas became Stalker, Dustin became Idiot, and I became Dickhead. I told you I was a total ass to her, remember? That's why she calls me that even though we're all friends now."

El nodded, but then cocked her head. "Why don't me and Will have nicknames?"

Mike shrugged. "I guess you guys haven't done anything weird, stupid, or dickish enough to warrant having one." He smirked. "Or maybe she has favourites."

El looked at their friends in front of them. Dustin was loudly refuting a point Lucas had made, while Will frowned at the map and Max watched the fight. "Do you think Max likes Dustin?"

Mike hummed appreciatively and squinted at the two people in question. "I don't know, she used to like Lucas but then nothing really came out of that. I mean, they kissed at the Snow Ball, Lucas told me, but then... nothing, I guess. I don't think they like each other anymore." The pair watched as Max whipped her head in the opposite direction when Dustin said her name, then turned back when he asked her about her position on the topic. "Mm, maybe you have a point."

El laughed. "I always have a point."

"True."

Just then, Will called the group's attention to the towering construction over their heads. "This is the one, El, you ready?"

The party cheered, minus Mike, whose mouth had suddenly gone dry. When El looked at him she noticed he appeared a little paler (the sunburn he'd gotten the week before had tanned him a bit). "Hey, are you okay? You don't have to come on if you're afraid."

The others were already lining up. "No, I'll, um, I'll come with you guys." He gulped. "Maybe just for this, though," he squeaked, eyes following the curve of the Ferris wheel behind them.

However, Mike's courage left him as they approached the front of the line. El could feel the fear coming off him, and it was making her jittery, so she turned him toward the exit and sent him off. The relief on his face was evident, as was the same feeling washing over him. Dustin and Lucas looked after him, wondering why he was leaving, but then they shrugged and returned to their conversation.

Will turned to his sister. "Is Mike okay?"

El nodded. "He's just scared of roller coasters so I made him leave."

"Oh. Well I can go with you, if you want?"

She smiled. "Okay."

The boys and Max cheered as the carts came into the station and people started getting off. "Okay, Will's going with El. Max, do you wanna go alone or with one of us?" Asked Dustin, gesturing between himself and Lucas.

Max shrugged. She had a preference, but they didn't need to know. "Doesn't matter."

Dustin grabbed her hand and brought her to his side. "Okay, you're coming with me, then. You don't mind, right Lucas?"

Lucas smirked knowingly. "Sure."

The three of them got seated in the first two rows of the cart, but then some random people got in front of Will and El and so they got

the very back. Will reassured her that the back was the best place to be; it made the drops better.

The coaster jerked, and El felt a rush in the pit of her stomach. She grabbed Will's hand.

"It's okay, it's just gonna go up that hill now, you see?"

As they started up, sun glinting in their eyes, El looked down to see the ground get farther with every second. She could see Mike down there, hair flopping and arms waving, his shirt flying up. She jerked it down without a thought, and almost laughed when he suddenly stopped his ridiculous flailing to stare at his clothes. Looking back up, she saw that they were nearly at the top of the hill.

"This is it, El!" Exclaimed Will.

She wasn't expecting the drop to be as steep as it was so she screamed all the way down and was breathing heavily as they shot forward before the next drop. Will was halfway out of his seat and yelling something about falling, while El was starting to feel nauseous. The coaster went over another drop, smaller this time, and she screamed again.

"I'M GONNA BE SICK!"

She felt weightless and like she was flying, and she didn't particularly like it. When the ride was over, El got off with shaking legs and wind-whipped hair. Ahead of her, Dustin was gesticulating excitedly to Max and Lucas high-fived Will. Exiting through the gate, El was enveloped by a pair of familiar arms and she leaned against him.

"El, are you okay?" She shook her head and Mike led her to a bench. "Guys, El's not feeling good!" He shouted to the others, and they all crowded around her speaking over each other in worried voices.

They only shut up when Will exclaimed, "Guys, shut up! She's not feeling well and you're not helping."

Mike shook his head and crouched in front of her, then looked up at their friends. "I'll stay with her and we'll do other stuff, you guys keep going on the rides you want. We'll just all meet at the hot dog stand

at twelve like Steve said."

The rest of the group agreed reluctantly; it was clear they didn't want to leave her while she was feeling sick (which she appreciated), but they also wanted to keep going on rides and they knew Mike would take good care of her. After they left, Mike sat next to her and took out a water bottle from his backpack. "Just breathe until you don't feel as bad," he instructed. "Then you can drink some water and if you want something to eat I have cereal bars and fruit."

It was quite unfortunate, she thought. She had been looking forward to this day ever since Hopper had said she could go, and now here she was being sick after the first ride. "I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry for, your stomach just doesn't agree with roller coasters."

Fifteen minutes later, the couple were standing in front of a milk bottle stand. Mike had seen a giant stuffed dinosaur (that for some reason looked oddly like Rory) and El had convinced him that they needed to get it after he explained how the game worked. Mike handed the man working the stand a dollar bill and passed the three tennis balls off to El. Her aim was much better than his, and anyway this should be part of her fair experience.

Mike leaned over by her ear. "You're technically not supposed to use your powers but these games are rigged so if you want to I'm not stopping you," he whispered, looking at her with a mischievous grin.

Of course, she knocked over all the bottles with her first throw, leaving the man gobsmacked as they smirked at each other. They walked away swinging Rory The Second (aptly named by El) between them.

"Are you having a good time, Ellie?" Mike asked.

She nodded. "A really good time, this is fun!"

They happened to meet back up with the others at the bumper cars, the rest of them having gone on the teacups to get dizzy before having to wait in the stupidly long line there always was for the

bumper cars. El laughed when she was told that Dustin had almost puked all over Max upon coming off, wishing she had been there to see it.

Soon it was time to meet with Steve, and they had to hurry their asses up or he might find a cop and report them missing. Luckily, the group arrived at the hot dog stand just at the same time as Steve did, and he nodded appreciatively. "Good, at least you dipshits are listening to me today." He yawned. "What do you guys want to eat? We can get hot dogs or if you saw something else-"

Dustin immediately overpowered him with shouts of "DEEP FRIED ONION RINGS AND FRIES!", to which Lucas and Mike responded with exasperated sighs and Will with a wrinkled nose.

"That sounds disgusting, idiot," said Max. El shrugged.

Dustin, however, was not deterred. "I don't care what you guys say, I'm getting some of those!"

Steve shook his head. "Have fun with your heart attack and premature death, Henderson. Are the rest of you okay with hot dogs?"

A few hours later, after having exhausted themselves on the rides as well as filled up on the most unhealthy foods imaginable (including, yes, the dreaded deep fried onion rings), the Party collapsed on a patch of grass for a breather before meeting back up with Steve to go home. They had just fully relaxed when Mike shot up again, pulling El with him.

"Sorry guys, I forgot something I wanted El to try!"

The pair ran off, ignoring the shouts of protest from their friends. "Come on, Ellie!"

El didn't know where Mike was taking her, but if he was this enthusiastic about it then it must be something great. He stopped in front of a cart where a woman was spinning a stick in some fluffy thing. El wrinkled her nose. "What's that?"

"Cotton candy," he answered. "Just trust me, it's delicious."

He bought two and they started to walk back to the entrance. El was overwhelmed by the strange sensation of eating what felt like air but tasted so *sugary*. It was weird, but she liked it. It was almost a perfect wrap-up to her day at the fair. Suddenly, Mike stopped, turning to pull something out of his backpack.

"Why do you have a camera?" She questioned.

He blushed a little. "I wanted to take at least one or maybe two pictures of us today so I asked my mom if I could go buy two of these. It's not a Polaroid so we won't have to worry about the picture falling out, but we can only take one picture on it."

El smiled. Why did she have the cutest boyfriend ever? "Come here, let's make a heart," she said, raising one of her hands in a half-heart shape. He raised his to meet hers and they smiled at each other from behind their heart. He was about to press the shutter to take the picture, awkwardly holding the camera facing them with one hand, when he felt El's other hand come up to the side of his face and tilt it down so she could reach his lips with hers. It gave her a rush much like the roller coaster had, but this was much better because she was safely on the ground and she had Mike with her. It would later turn out to be quite the cute photo, even if it was a little fuzzy and taken at an awkward angle.

"Hey! I said I was watching you, Hopper!"

El groaned, looking away from Mike with an irritated expression. "Shut *up*, Steve!" Then a thought occurred to her. "We should take a group picture! You have another camera, right, Mike?" He took out another camera from his backpack and presented it to her, which she promptly handed to Steve.

Steve seemed to get the point and went to ask some random woman if she could take a photo of them while the pair joined the rest of the group by the gate. "Hey, excuse me, but would you mind taking a picture of me with my kids? They're right over here, yeah, these teenagers..."

El snorted. "We're his *kids*."

Dustin, behind her, nodded sagely. "He basically became our designated babysitter and you know, stuff led from there. We've been adopted, we're all Harringtons now."

The Party broke into laughter, and they were still standing with laughs in their expressions when Steve joined them and the woman took the picture.

Years later, when El was packing her stuff into boxes before heading off to college, she stopped in front of her picture corkboard, smiling and remembering the warmth and happiness of that day. It was a memory she'd go back to a lot on the bad days, because it helped remind her that she had a family in her friends and that they loved her for who she was, even if she didn't really like roller coasters or deep fried onion rings.

lol disposable cameras make for great selfies, amirite?

24. Chapter 24

here's an interesting one

THIS WAS SAPPING ALL MY ENERGY gOd but finally it's done jeez

also i'm sorry i write so much mileven i can't help it but in future i am going to make attempts at other friendships also

btw there is an easter egg to the next chapter in this one but i ain't tellin you where it's at so if you wanna guess have a go

X is for X Marks The Spot

August 1988, Hawkins, IN

"Hey, El, what are you thinking about college?"

El and Max were going to have a sleepover and had kicked Will out of the house to go hang with the boys, and Joyce and Hopper were out somewhere. At the moment Max was lying upside down over the end of the couch, watching her friend root around in the fridge.

"What?" El shut the door with her hip, bringing over two cans of ginger ale.

"College," repeated the redhead. "What are you thinking?"

El sat down and Max flipped back up, taking the drink offered to her. "I don't know. I want to go, but I don't know if I will," answered El, cracking open the can and taking a sip.

Max eyed her over her own can. "Why not?"

"Ugh, it's so hot," sighed the brown-haired girl, turning to the fan in the corner of the room. She shook her head, trying to free some of her curls from her sweaty forehead. "I don't know, I just feel like- like I'm stupid, sometimes," she said, looking out the window and chugging some more ginger ale. "Colleges aren't going to accept me. I didn't even legally exist until four years ago, Max!"

Max snorted, throwing her feet over the other girl's lap. "But you *legally exist* now, duh. And you're not stupid, whoever the fuck told you that was a dumbass. You can't let something like that bring you down if you really wanna go to college."

"Okay, but I don't even know what I want, how am I supposed to apply to places if I don't know what they offer or what I even want?"

Max pointed at El with her can. "See, that's what I mean. Don't be so negative. You'll figure it out, you don't need to know exactly what you're doing yet, anyway. And Jonathan went to college, didn't he? See if you can talk to him, or maybe Joyce or something. Or even talk to Mike and see if you can get a hold of Nancy."

El thought about it for a second. "I mean, Jon kind of already knew what he wanted though, and he said he would've gone to New York anyway even if NYU didn't accept him. Will's not even going at all," she added with a small shake of her head. "I guess I could see if I can talk to Nancy. She was always good at advice."

Max smiled, feeling like she'd gotten through.

"What about you?"

At this, she frowned. "I guess I don't really know, either. I wanna go back to California but my mom and Neil will probably disown me or something so that'll leave me with no money and no way to pay tuition if I even figure out what I want to go in for, but it's at least a start. But I don't know if Dustin does, so I don't know what's going to happen with... us."

El hadn't thought about that. "What about..." She trailed off and Max rolled her eyes.

"I don't think you have anything to worry about there. You and Wheeler'll follow each other to the ends of the earth. And I love Dustin, I do, but it's not like you guys. You two are *really fuckin'* something else."

El took another sip and looked away again, Max copying before speaking. "Okay, I'm sorry I brought this up, shit just got real and

we're supposed to be having fun so let's do something else!"

El grinned, her spirits buoyed by her best friend's enthusiasm. "Okay, just a second." She closed her eyes.

"Ugh, are you gonna do that weird thing again?"

MIKE!

WHAT'S WRONG?

Nothing, just, is there a way I can talk to Nancy?

Max punched her arm. "Stop doing that! It freaks me out," she laughed.

Why?

I need to ask her for some advice.

Oookay, I can call her and ask if she has time to sit and talk to you soon.

Great, talk to you later, love!

Bye?

El stood, shoving Max's feet off her and stretching. "Okay, I'm gonna talk to Nancy soon."

Max groaned. "Ugh, you *did* do the weird thing!"

"You know I can do it with anyone, right?"

"What?"

"I've done it with Will before, it's just easier with Mike because his mind is more open to... *me*, I think."

Max grabbed her hand and dragged her back down. "Oh, we are so trying that right now."

The next week, El was over at the Wheelers' for dinner. Mike had told her to come over that day because it was Nancy's day off so she could sit and talk on the phone without having to worry about being anywhere, and it had done El a world of good to sit and talk on the phone. She now had a clearer idea of what she might like to do (work with kids) and Nancy had told her that there were tons of records on colleges in Hawkins Public Library, so all she had to do was look and see what she found.

"El, honey, how are you? It's been a while since we've had you for dinner," said Karen from across the table. Mrs. Wheeler had always been kind to her, even after finding out the truth about her mysterious appearance in Mike's life and their (what seemed to be) sudden attachment.

"I'm good, everything's been great." She smiled and squeezed Mike's hand under the table. "How are things here?"

Dinner progressed without incident, Mr. Wheeler only asking if she was going to college, to which she responded that she was thinking about it and having some ideas but wasn't really sure yet. After helping to clear the table, she and Mike ran off to the basement, her trying to escape his wandering fingers.

"Stop tickling me, you *dick*!" She gasped.

"Alright, alright!" He held his hands up. "I'm stopping!"

She glared. "You'd better." She sat on the couch and Mike flopped onto it, his head landing in her lap and her hands going straight to his hair.

"So... college?"

El rolled her eyes. "Why is everyone asking me that?"

"Well, it's literally what you talked to Nancy about for *at least* an hour, so."

"I don't know..." She sighed, smiling a little when she noticed he had his eyes closed, enjoying the feeling of her fingers in his hair. "After talking to Nancy, I think I'd like to work with kids. Maybe to help

them get out of hard lives because I don't want kids to be like I was when they don't have to be."

"So a social worker, then? Or something like that."

"Or something."

Mike hummed. "Well, there's lots of good sociology programs across the country, you could do that."

"What do you want?"

"Huh?"

"What do you want?" She repeated.

"Like, for me?"

El nodded. "Yeah."

He smiled. "I think I want to write. Creative writing though, not journalism like Nance."

"That's cool. What about science, though?"

Mike tilted his head to the side. "I don't know, maybe minor in electrical engineering or something. I like radios," he offered.

"Or music?"

At this he shook his head, opening his eyes to look at her. "Nah, that's a side thing. I'm definitely not advanced enough to get into college with it anyway, I just mess around sometimes."

She nodded again. "Okay." Pausing her movements, she looked at the ceiling, deciding whether to bring up her next point. "What about us?"

Mike sat up. "What do you mean, what about us?"

"Well, Max sounded kind of worried about what's going to happen to her and Dustin because she doesn't think they want to go to the same places."

He suddenly looked like he'd just seen a puppy killed in front of him. "Do you- are you asking if we're gonna break up?"

Her look was answer enough. "El, *what*? No! Not ever! I don't want to be separated from you ever again, do you get me? Never." It reassured her a little bit, that he was so fervently declaring that they would never be separate again. "Unless you want to... then I guess I can't stop you," he added meekly, looking at the floor.

"No!" She grabbed his hands, pulling him toward her. "Never again," she said, looking into his eyes. "We'll figure it out. You won't lose me."

"Promise?" He sniffed. This was oddly reminiscent of the short exchange they'd had those four years ago, right before she'd left to close the gate.

"Promise."

Over the next months, El did her research and applied to Penn State, University of Iowa, Indiana U Bloomington (which she'd be able to live at home for), and additionally UCLA because what was there to lose? It was a good school, and if things ended up going one way or another, she knew Max was going to be in California. Since Will was mostly just focussed on finishing out his senior year strong (and papers for that thing called *immigration* that she still wasn't entirely sure she understood), he helped her a lot with her applications. He proofread her essays, looked over the full applications to make sure everything was checked off and complete, and even went with her to the post office in town to drop them off.

"I'm so proud of you, El," he would say. "You came really far."

Hopper and Joyce always said the same thing, and it was one of the few times in her life that she didn't deeply doubt what she was doing. There were *some* doubts, of course, and days where all she could think about was how she was going to get four rejection letters and never be able to do anything she felt was significant in her life, but her friends and family always pushed her to do what she wanted, and now she was taking the next big step and she was doing it because

she wanted to.

It was with these high spirits that she went to the mailbox one afternoon in early April when no one else was home and opened her first letter back with shaking fingers right on the spot. It was from Penn State.

Dear Jane Eleanor Hopper,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been offered a place at our school in the upcoming year of study, 1989-1990. It is our utmost pleasure to welcome bright students...

"I GOT IN!" She punched the air with the biggest grin on her face, an insane amount of energy ripping through her. Capitalizing on it, she ran back in to leave the letter and grabbed her bike (which she hadn't used in a long while) to rush into town. Coming to a screeching halt in front of Melvald's, El ran into the store, almost knocking over a display of flowers. Joyce was standing at the cash register, and looked a little scared when her daughter came running inside.

"What- what is it, sweetie? Is something wrong, did someone get-"

"I GOT IN!"

It took a moment for it to register in Joyce's head, but when it did she almost jumped over the counter to hug El. "Oh, that's amazing! I'm so happy for you, honey! Which one?" She held El by her shoulders, really realizing for the first time how much she had grown since being that small and scared little kid she and Hop had discovered with Will's friends.

"Penn State," responded El excitedly. "I'm so happy! I can't even believe this right now, I have to go tell Hop and then I have to go tell Mike, and then the rest of them and..." She let out a scream. "I did it! I got into college!"

Joyce enveloped her in another hug, then let her go and pushed her out the door, chuckling. "Go, go tell your dad!"

"See you later, Mom!"

El sprinted around the corner to the police station, startling Flo when she barged in. "Flo- Flo, is my dad here?"

Flo pressed a button on the phone. "Chief, your daughter's here. Go on in," she said, nodding her head towards the hallway where Hopper's office was.

He'd barely gotten a word out of his mouth before she screamed. "I GOT IN!"

Hopper's eyes widened. "You- college?" She nodded, out of breath. "Which one?"

"Penn State!"

"Wow, that's a great school." Hopper stood, a rare smile taking over his face as he held his arms out. "Come here, I'm so proud of you. You've come so far and it's been hard but you deserve it."

"I just- oh god, I'm so happy, I'm gonna get to go to college! I already told Mom but I still can't believe it."

Hopper kissed the top of her head then pulled back, ruffling her hair. "No Mike yet?"

El shook her head. "I could have, on my way, but I want to tell him in person."

"I think he'll cry," Hopper laughed. "How about tonight after dinner we have some Eggo Extravaganzas? I'll swing by Bradley's to get the stuff. We'll celebrate, how's that sound?"

"Yes! Thanks so much, Dad!"

Hopper chuckled, letting her go. "I hope you know I'm proud of you, kid," he said fondly, watching her walk out.

Mike happened to be outside with Holly when El arrived, dropping her bike at the front of the house and running around to the side where she'd seen them.

"Ellie!" Screeched Holly, bringing her brother's attention to the

sudden appearance of his girlfriend.

"Oh, hey El, is everything okay?" He asked, concerned.

"I GOT IN!" By the amount of times she'd said that within the last forty-five minutes, you'd think she'd have come up with a better way to say it. "Penn State!"

"Holy shit!" He laughed. "That's amazing! Holy sh-"

She cut him off with a kiss, trying to convey her happiness in one the best ways she knew how. They'd forgotten Holly was there until Mike fell backwards because she'd pulled on the back of his sweater.

"Get out, Mike, I wanna hug her too!"

By mid-May, everything was set. Will had made arrangements to fly up to the city he was intent on moving to after graduation to scout out apartments, Lucas was looking into either the army or the air force, Max had decided to take a year off at least to reconnect with her dad and try things out, and the other three had heard back from colleges they'd applied to.

Dustin had gotten accepted to everywhere except Stanford (which El found ridiculous, because why would anyone reject Dustin? He was absolutely fantastic, in her non-biased opinion), but ultimately decided on Cornell. This meant things looked bleak for him and Max, and before long the group was subjected to less time with the two as they attempted to make the best of the time they had left together. It made El sad to see her two friends like that, and it also made her worry about her own relationship (no matter what Max said).

That reminded her that she needed to sit down and have a talk with Mike. Both of them had yet to reply to any colleges, toeing the line between their ideal reality and the one they faced. He had so far only gotten acceptances from the places he'd applied to, as had she. What they needed now was to talk to each other and figure out what they wanted.

"Hey, Mike?" She was lying on the floor while he scribbled something

out in one of his endless supply of notebooks at the old D&D table. It was a warm Friday afternoon, and they had been trying to avoid the heat by staying in his house, in the basement where it was coolest. They would be joining their friends later for a late swim in Lake Jordan, but for now it was just the two of them.

"Yeah?"

"Can we talk?"

He put down his pencil and looked at her, slightly nervous. "That's always the breakup starter."

She rolled her eyes, something she'd *definitely* picked up from him even if he refused to admit it. "I'm not breaking up with you, you mouthbreather. At least I don't think I am."

"Sorry. I'm just- on edge, what with Max and Dustin being the way they are right now, and... sorry."

El sighed, running her fingers hurriedly through her sweaty hair. "Do you want to break up? Like, do you think that would be the best idea?"

Mike got up and came to lie down next to her, lacing their fingers above their heads. "I don't know. I definitely know I don't want to break up, *ever*, but if it's for the best, I guess... I only want what's best for you, you know? I'm so proud of you for getting into college, for even deciding to go, and I don't want to hold you back from going somewhere because of leaving me."

The pair stared at the ceiling in silence for a few minutes before El sat up, putting her head in her hands. "I don't want to hold *you* back," she mumbled. "I don't know what to do, Mike."

Ever the problem-solver, he was quick to come up with a solution. "What's your first choice? I think if we go to different colleges that are still close to each other we can do it."

She sniffed, feeling tears start to form. "Penn State, I think. But maybe Indiana Bloomington, because it would be nice to be close to home."

He cursed under his breath. "Never mind then. Northwestern and Columbia are too far."

"Where else?"

"There's Brown too, but that's Rhode Island which is even farther, and one more I haven't heard back from yet so I'm not counting it."

"God." She shook her head. "If I went to Bloomington, Northwestern's in Chicago, right? It's not that far."

"It's, like, right outside Chicago, but that doesn't matter- El, it's still over four hours' drive! Neither of us is gonna make that every weekend or something, when would we see each other?"

Sighing, El stood, grabbing her bag and feeling a tear slip out of her eye. "Maybe we should take some time and think about what we want," she said, walking toward the door.

Mike scrambled up from his position on the floor, reaching for her. "Wait, is this- *is this what I think it is?*" He choked, dark eyes glistening.

She looked out the door. "Think of it as a break, if you want." Opening the door, she walked out. "Bye, Mike. See you later."

He didn't respond, and she didn't look back.

A few hours later, the group was meeting at the lake, only waiting on Lucas and Mike. It was unlike them to be late, and when Lucas showed up alone it only made it weirder.

"Where's Mike?" Asked Will.

Lucas shook his head. "He said he wasn't coming. I went to his basement to get him and he was lying on the floor- I swear to god I thought he was dead for a full two seconds." Turning to El, he asked, "The fuck happened? I thought you two were together. Also, he looked like he'd been crying."

She looked away, not wanting to meet Lucas' piercing gaze. *He's*

crying? Oh fuck. The last thing she wanted was to hurt Mike, but it seemed she had. Why couldn't things just be easy? "We're... taking some time to think about stuff."

Will inhaled sharply as Max and Dustin looked at each other uncomfortably. If Mike and El, the legendary romance, the ones who called and listened every day for almost a whole year, who fought interdimensional monsters just to be able to have some peace and be together, could *break up*, there wasn't much that could be said for anyone else.

Lucas had one hand on his forehead and the other on his hip, looking very frustrated. "So, let me get this straight- you're kind of broken up?"

El nodded wordlessly.

Lucas cursed. "What the fuck, right when he was going to- you know what, never mind. You guys just got over that fight you had and now this?"

Will put a hand on his sister's shoulder. "Lucas, I don't think this is the time..."

"No, it's not the time!" Lucas brought his gaze back to El. "Look, whatever the hell happened, you two need to make up ASAP. Okay? Jesus, he literally looked like a ghost..." He stalked off. "I'm going home!"

"Lucas, you can't go home!" It was Dustin. Lucas ignored him. "Lucas, son of a bitch, come back! *Lucas!*"

Max had a hand on the back of her neck, rubbing awkwardly. "Does anyone even feel like swimming right now?"

"Not really," answered Will. "I think I'm gonna take El home."

She didn't say a word the entire way, and when they got back to the empty house she went straight to her room and collapsed on her bed. What had she *done*? She didn't think she'd ever regretted something so much.

Will walked in half an hour later with a cup of warm milk and some cookies on a plate. "Here, this'll make you feel a little better," he said, placing the items on her bedside table and reaching down to wipe her face with a tissue he'd also brought. "I thought I'd give you some space for a bit, but do you wanna talk now?"

El took a large gulp of the milk, letting it warm her and soothe her scratchy throat. "I don't know what to do, Will."

He sat down next to her on the bed, gaze softening as he noticed her soaked pillow. "Okay, well, for starters, who did the breaking up?"

"Me."

Will didn't look surprised. "Yeah, didn't think it would've been him. Why'd you do it?"

She swallowed thickly, staring into the milk. "We were trying to figure out what to do about college, because we didn't want to leave each other but... I don't know. It just happened. It didn't even hit me until Lucas showed up, but now it *hurts* and I feel so stupid. Why did I do that to him? I made him cry, Will!"

She looked over to see Will furrowing his brows. "Sometimes we get caught up in the moment and do things we don't want to. But if you guys don't want to split up, just go to the same college, like, what's the problem?"

"What do you mean?" She sniffled.

"I mean what I just said, go to the same college. I'm sure they'll accept you both, the two of you are great students." He paused, taking in her confused expression. "The one you both applied to, I don't remember the name! Go there."

"Will... are you okay?" He stared. "We didn't apply to any of the same colleges, which now that I think about it we probably should have talked earlier and could have avoided this."

Her brother glared at the floor. "That idiot. He didn't tell you, did he? Remember he was originally only going to apply to three places but then his mom made him choose a fourth? It was one of the same ones

as you, I remember he told me. I just don't know the name right now."

El bit her lip. "He did say he was waiting on a fourth he hadn't heard back from, and I haven't heard back from Iowa yet. Was it Iowa?"

Will's eyes lit up. "That's the one! He said it had good writing programs."

"But why didn't he tell me?"

He glared at the door this time, getting up. "I don't know but he's about to get an earful," he grumbled, stomping to the phone.

El would have reached out to Mike herself but she thought he might not want to hear from her right now, so instead she followed Will to the phone and stood close enough behind him to hear faintly what was being said over the call.

After three rings, someone picked up. "Wheeler residence, Karen speaking," came the tinny sound of Mrs. Wheeler's voice.

"Hi, Mrs. Wheeler, can I talk to Mike for a minute? It's Will."

"Sure, honey. *MICHAEL! Will's on the phone!*" A pause, and then, "Sorry, sweetie, he said he can't talk right now. Did you want me to tell him something?"

Will breathed sharply through his nose. "Tell him it's urgent."

Moments later, Mike was on the other end, sounding out of breath (he'd probably just run up the stairs, and he was the most out of shape of all of them). "What's wrong? What happened, is it- is it El? Did something happen to her?!"

"You *fucking* idiot." It was rare for Will to swear, leaving both his sister and his best friend shocked. "Why didn't you tell her? That the fourth college you applied to was the same one as her?"

"Oh." She heard Mike suck in a shaky breath, then exhale slowly. "I guess I... forgot? And then today I didn't want to get her hopes up if we don't both end up getting in, 'cause I haven't heard back yet." He

paused, and Will was about to say something when Mike spoke again. "Is she there? Can I talk to her?"

"She's here, but I don't know if she wants to talk to you." Will looked at El, who nodded in approval, making grabby hands for the phone. "Never mind. You two better make up, okay? It hurts me to see this much stupidity."

He handed the phone off to his sister, who pressed it up against her ear immediately. "Mike?"

"El! Oh my god, I'm so sorry. I was the *biggest* idiot, I don't know why I didn't tell you. Are you mad?"

She shook her head before remembering he couldn't see her. "No. Not really. It was stupid, but you can't change it now. And I'm sorry too. I should have thought it through before I said what I said, I don't want to break up."

Mike sighed, the line crackling. "God, why are we so fucking *dumb*?"

El heard a muffled "*Michael!*" In the background. "Sorry, Mom, it slipped out."

"Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Are we okay? I want to be okay."

She could tell he was smiling by the tone of his voice. "Yeah, we're okay. We just gotta wait and see what happens now, with Iowa."

She smiled too, the despair leaving her as soon as he said they were okay. "Okay. I'm gonna talk to Will, see you tomorrow." She took a breath before adding, "I love you."

"Love you too. Good night, El."

"Night, Mike."

A week later, the pair ran into each other on their way to each other's

houses, screeching with delight that they'd both been accepted. If anyone had walked past, they might have been confused about the random couple yelling in the middle of the street. It looked like they were fighting, but they both had the widest smiles on their faces. In the end, it was Iowa they decided on. They could stay together, which was good because it was too hard to be apart, and it was also not so far from home (only about a six hour drive, but when you've got the love of your life with you time passes faster).

Iowa City, here we come.

my favourite part of this chap was either lucas being all salty or will being The Best Brother™

p.s what do you think the easter egg is? hint: what's a three letter word that starts with Y,,,

also i just made a tumblr for this so if anyone wants to keep up with me on there i will be posting progress updates and just like,, send me asks or smth i like friends but making them in comment sections is tedious

it's urdearestmom if you wanna like,, gimme a follow or,,,,,,,,,,,,,

25. Chapter 25

holee fucc you guys

i'm posting chapter y right now but z is coming right after bc it's been done since before christmas and i'm just,,

this fic is officially done? wow..

also please let it be known that for the purposes of this chapter, mike is not as uncoordinated as we all know finn is lol

Y is for Yes

May 1989, Hawkins, IN

Mike's really hoping this doesn't go to shit, and that involves trusting the cheerleading squad. Will has told him that Jennifer Hayes is trustworthy, but he isn't sure about the rest of the cheerleaders. They aren't exactly the fondest of him and his group of friends.

Nevertheless, he works up the courage to talk to Jennifer after school one day, and she agrees because she feels like she kind of owes him after his help in chemistry class (also because Jennifer is generally a nice girl, and who is she to keep a boy from asking his girl such an important question?). Now he's literally spent an hour with four of them for the past three days so he can learn to do a cartwheel. Except Jennifer wants him to do *more* than one?

He's lying on the school field, panting, hair sweaty and shirt rumpled, as a group of cheerleaders surround him. "Come on, Mike!" Says Jennifer. "You've done a bunch of good ones, now you just have to do them in a row."

He groans. "I'm gonna *die* before that happens."

Silvia Gillespie snorts from his right, offering him a hand. "Get up, wastoid, it won't look cool if you only do one, and then there would've been no point in us helping you."

"Jesus, you guys are aggressive."

A week later, Jennifer, Silvia, and the other two have deemed Mike stable enough in his cartwheels that he doesn't need to practice with them every day. Now it's down to keeping them stable and working out the kinks of the rest of his plan with the remaining members of the squad. The last pep rally of the year is in two weeks, so Mike has exactly fourteen days until he has to execute this plan perfectly.

One of those weeks is spent fighting with El, which takes half his morale away when he practices outside of his house because this is *for* her but she doesn't get it. She thinks he's cheating on her instead, which is literally the complete opposite of what he's doing, and it makes him so mad that he trips on every other cartwheel. He's losing it and Lucas tells him so when he catches Mike doing some half-assed practice.

"She's literally mad at you and you're out here doing cartwheels instead of making up?"

"You don't get it, Lucas! Just let me practice in peace!"

Lucas snorts. "That's a level of commitment I don't know if I've seen anywhere else. Or maybe it's regular old Stupid Michael making an appearance."

Mike stands up, huffing. "It's for prom, okay? We'll just have to make up before the pep rally next week, but I think we will because I don't know how much longer I can keep telling myself I'm mad at her. Like, I am, but also not."

Lucas leaves him alone after that, simply going inside to grab the jacket he'd left accidentally on Saturday.

The couple does make up, but then everything goes to shit on the Friday before the Monday pep rally when it seems like they've broken up. *Fuck college*, he thinks as he lies on the basement floor in tears, *I won't even go if it means we don't have to break up*.

It's Lucas who finds him again, but Mike doesn't offer an explanation this time, just a heartbroken look that tells his best friend enough.

However, when Will calls later that evening, and Mike makes up with El once more, he's back to his plan with renewed fervour. He even enlists Holly to help him paint out some signs and cover them in pink glitter (she has a lot of it, and El likes both pink and shiny, glittery things).

By the time they finish, both siblings are covered in hot pink glitter and their mother yells at them for getting the carpet full of it too, but Holly and Mike high five at their accomplishment (Mike's also just proud it doesn't turn out half as bad as the time El made Christmas cards and got glitter all over him and then everyone else, somehow).

Sunday afternoon, Mike brings Lucas with him to the school field for the last practice with the cheerleaders so he can watch how the plan will unfold, and Lucas commends them all on this fine orchestration. Mike can't really tell if he's being sarcastic or not, but he thinks it's pretty cute and so do the girls, so he decides he's gonna take his shot anyway.

On Monday, just before the rally is due to start, Mike runs up to Lucas in the hall. "Lucas!"

Lucas turns. "What?"

"You and Will are the only ones who know what I'm planning but I don't know where he is, so I need you to, like, distract El, or something," he says, out of breath. "Or make up something so that she doesn't wonder why the hell I'm not with you guys."

Lucas squints before nodding. "Don't worry. I got it, man."

"That sounds a lot more reassuring coming out of your mouth than Dustin's. Thanks, man!" He's off again, needing to get to the field before most of the school does so he can hide out near the cheerleaders without getting questioned.

A few minutes later, El is sitting down next to Max near the top of the bleachers at the end of the row, leaving a space on her other side for her tardy boyfriend. Lucas had said that Mike went to the washroom and should be back soon, and not to worry. However, as

ten, then fifteen, then twenty minutes go by with no sign of him, El is definitely worrying. It shouldn't have taken him this long to use the washroom! What if he's hurt himself? Or worse, what if the bad men have come back and kidnapped him? That's the ever-present fear, one that will never really go away, that her friends and family will be taken away from her.

Just as she's about to get up and go look for him, Lucas reaches across Max and says, "Hey, the cheerleaders are coming on and they're more interesting than the athletes. Just wait until they're done and then you can go look for him, alright?"

El gives him a weird look, but she says okay anyway and sits down again. She watches as the group of girls does their usual combination of flips, tumblers, throws, and jumps that always mesmerizes her because *how do they do that?* It's literally one of the coolest things ever. The whole school is on their feet screaming and applauding them, but that means they're done so El gets up and starts walking down the stairs and Lucas doesn't stop her. She's at the bottom when Jennifer Hayes picks up the microphone that the coaches had used to announce athletes' names and starts to speak.

"Thank you so much, Hawkins High!" She yells, chest heaving as she smiles widely. "We love you! Now, we have another, *special*, routine we added on by request of someone who is insanely devoted to his girlfriend! The girls are just setting up real quick and it's a short routine, so we'll be done in no time!" She puts the mic back and runs over to her position on the field. The other cheerleaders are carrying some pieces of white bristol board onto the grass and getting into formation behind them.

El is intrigued now. What boy got the cheerleaders to help him ask his girlfriend to prom? That's all this can be, really. She wishes that Mike would just ask her already, and she decides then and there that if he doesn't do it in the next week she's going to ask him herself. She stands on the edge of the field next to the bleachers and observes as the group of four on the far left does a series of cartwheels and back handsprings, then one girl runs forward to grab the bristol board in front of her and her teammates hoist her up into the air. A glittery pink P shines in the sunlight.

Aw, this is cute! That girlfriend is lucky, El thinks. The next group does the same and lifts up a sparkling R. The third lifts an M, and with the last group of girls rises a question mark. There's one board left in the middle which must be the O, and onto the field comes running another person who is not in cheerleading uniform, so it must be the boy who's orchestrated this.

He does five slightly crooked cartwheels in a row (El counts), and almost falls at the end. He picks up the last board and it's a heart instead of an O, and in it there is a drawing. El's close enough to see that the drawing is of a picture she knows Jonathan took. It's a picture of her and Mike when the ball dropped at midnight on the first day of 1987. It's a picture she knows both she and Mike have a copy of, and that's when she notices that the boy standing under the heart is Mike himself, grinning wildly at her.

"EL!" He yells as loud as he can, voice cracking. "WILL YOU GO TO PROM WITH ME?"

It's at this moment that it really, truly, hits home for her how in love she is. He went to all the effort of organizing this, convincing some of the most popular girls in school to help him along with what must have been her own brother, judging by the drawing, just to ask her to prom. If that isn't the definition of devoted, then she doesn't know what is, and she thinks Jennifer was quite right in using the word to describe him a few minutes earlier.

"YES!" She yells back, then runs over and tackles him to the ground, taking the sign with them. Their entire school is screaming behind them, because they've never seen anything so cute. It's a promposal for the books, and will remain legendary at Hawkins High for a long time. As she looks into his eyes and sees her very feelings reflected there, she thinks that there's never been a love like this.

so you really thought this was gonna be the proposal chapter? lol
#fakenews

i mean i guess it could be considered a proposal but it's not a *proposal*
proposal yknow

gimme a looksee on tumblr urdearestmom bc i am going to start writing new stuff soon and will be posting progress updates and also new friends are great? :D

26. Chapter 26

well fuck here we are

wow

enjoy this cuz you all thought it was gonna be last chapter lol i'm still laughing

i made a spotify playlist for this and the songs are in the same order, so in case you're wondering:

edit: fanfiction is weird and doesn't post links properly which,, UUGH, but if you search on spotify this is my username: onvcz2hstgwrfulw5tpl3pkwre

it's a playlist titled "noice" lol

Z is for Zoisite

December 1992, Hawkins, IN

"Hey Mike, when's the wedding?"

Dustin had always been quite the straightforward friend, but Mike was shocked. He choked on the Heineken he was drinking and spilled half of the rest on the bar.

"What?" He spluttered.

"Come on, dude, you've been in love with her since you met and you've been dating for like 7 years. It's about time!" Interjected Lucas.

Will smiled from Mike's right. "I don't see what the problem is, Mike."

Mike was already the colour of a ripe tomato. "I just- we haven't really talked about it!"

Lucas snorted. "You and your girlfriend of seven years haven't ever talked about marriage?"

Mike looked down at the puddle of beer. "We have and- we both want to get married someday, it's just- what if it's not the right time, what if she doesn't want to get married now? Or what if she changed her mind and just hasn't told me yet?"

Will decided that Mike was in need of some comforting and so patted his tall friend's hunched shoulder. "Listen, El loves you and I'm sure she always will. If she didn't, I don't think she would've stuck around as long as she has."

"Yeah, dude! Come on, every call I answer with an Iowa area code I think you're calling to tell me that you're getting married, but it never is and I get more disappointed each time," added Dustin.

"Yeah, and every New York area code I answer I think it's you calling to say you finally got a girlfriend! But it never is!"

Lucas winced. "You've been burned, Dustin."

Dustin gave Mike the stink-eye. "Just because I'm the only single one here does not mean you can't get married, Mike."

Mike huffed. "Alright, fine! I'll think about it. Let's just talk about something else for now, okay?"

His friends laughed and dropped that topic of conversation for the night, but it left Mike thinking. Was it time? Unbeknownst to Dustin, Mike had already bought a ring. Way back in August, when his cousin got married and they had to fly out to Florida for it, he and El had been dancing and he had looked down at her head on his shoulder and thought 'I need to marry her'. So as soon as they'd returned to Iowa for classes, he went downtown on his free day to go ring shopping. He'd found the one not long after starting, a small green and pink rock wrapped in wire. It wasn't big or flashy, which he thought she would appreciate because she didn't like to attract too much attention unless she meant to. Even with that, there was just something about it that called to him. It was cute.

Then he'd gotten back to their apartment and been hit by a sudden bout of fear, hiding it because *what if she doesn't want to?* Luckily for him, she hadn't found it yet. It crossed his mind from time to time,

the ring hiding in its little box at the back of the top shelf over the fridge, in the cupboard she never used because she couldn't reach it. But he never made a move. He was too scared.

When they'd packed up for Hawkins for Christmas though, something had told him he needed to bring it. He didn't know, but he thought that maybe some cosmic force was guiding him, saying *hey, maybe it's time!* And now Dustin had to go and remind him of that. It was like he knew...

The next day, El was out with Joyce so Mike was left to hang around his house and stew in his thoughts. He was sitting on the couch in the basement staring into space until his sister came down the stairs, shaking him from his stupor.

"Hey, Mikey!" Said Holly. "Whatcha doin'?"

He sighed as she sat next to him. "Just thinking about stuff."

"What kind of stuff?"

"Grown-up stuff."

She scowled, indignant. "I'm twelve!"

That made him laugh. "Right, really grown-up," he answered, reaching over to tuck her head under his arm and ruffle her blonde hair. She shrieked and pushed him away, yelling about ruining it. Mike remembered when he was her age, and how the things he'd gone through had made him grow up faster than he should have. He was glad Holly didn't have to experience those same things; instead the worst of her worries was her brother ruining her hair.

"C'mere, Hol," he said, pulling her back into a hug. "I wish I could be around for you more, it can't be easy to be the only kid in this house."

Holly's voice was muffled against his shoulder. "I guess it's not bad, Mom just- she's weird sometimes. Like, sometimes she's really worried about me and wants to know everything that's going on, but other times it's like she doesn't care at all," she said, pulling back to look at her brother's face. "She just lets me go to my friends' houses

without even asking, and if I stay late she doesn't call. And Dad is just- the same as ever," she finished.

Mike nodded, understanding perfectly. Their household wasn't a terrible one, but it wasn't the easiest. He was pretty sure his parents had never loved each other; if they had he hadn't been around to see it. Having parents that don't love each other takes a toll on a kid. "Well hey, if you ever need to talk about something and you don't have anyone else to talk to, you know mine and El's number, right? We're usually home if we're not in class or working."

Holly's face was overtaken by a wide grin, warming Mike's heart but also striking dread into his soul. That grin couldn't mean anything good.

"I talk to Rich sometimes, when he's not busy being a douche nozzle, but right, El..." She trailed off. "When are you gonna ask her to marry you? I'm so tired of waiting for you to make your move."

He almost choked on his own spit. "What?!"

"Literally my entire life, Michael. I have been waiting for it."

What the fuck is up with this! "Why do people keep asking me that?" He groaned. "Dustin asked me when the wedding was yesterday."

Holly sat back, crossing her legs. "Well maybe we have a point."

Mike glared at her. "You're such a little shit, you know that?" He groused.

Holly smirked. "Yeah, but you love me."

He let out a long-suffering sigh. "Unfortunately. But yeah, I was, um- I was thinking of asking her soon. I'm just nervous, and I don't know how to go about it, really." He paused, considering this particular situation, then made a face. "Jesus, why am I talking to my twelve-year-old sister about this?"

"Because I'm awesome," she offered, before launching into a list of reasons why. She really was a little shit, but that was what it was to be a kid and Mike was glad she was allowed to be that way.

"Okay, well, do you wanna help me then?" He interrupted.

"What?"

"Do you wanna help me figure out how to ask her?" He clarified.

Holly clapped excitedly. "Yes! Do you have a ring already?"

Mike scowled. "Of course I do, did you think I was just gonna propose without one? Jeez."

"Can I see it?!"

He got up, offering her a hand. "It's in my room, come on."

Just as the pair made it to the upstairs staircase, Nancy walked in the door, having decided to take today to visit with her family. Holly grabbed her arm and dragged her with them. The trio ran up past their parents, ignoring their mother when she yelled after them. The three siblings spent the next hour plotting and then Holly went back downstairs to watch TV, leaving Mike with Nancy to go over his tape collection.

"Okay, let's see... I really doubt you have Whitney Houston, Cyndi Lauper, or Berlin, Mike," said Nancy, looking at the list they'd made.

Mike ran a hand through his hair, suddenly feeling weird. "I know I don't, but Dustin has Cyndi Lauper and he *might* still have Berlin because I remember him being obsessed with Top Gun when it came out, I'll ask him. And El bought the Whitney Houston one because she loves that song so much, it's in our car."

Nancy nodded, looking pensive. "I think I might have some of the others, though... I'll take a look. What on this list *do* you have?"

Mike picked it up, naming the ones he knew. "The Police, U2, Poison, and Eric Clapton I know for sure. I might have the Foreigner one that song is on," he added, opening a box of tapes he'd left in his closet in Hawkins the last time he'd been here. Rifling through, he pulled out a tape. "Yup, here it is."

"Okay," said Nancy, grabbing a pen to cross off the songs on the list

that they already had. "You need Richard Marx, Prince, Chris de Burgh, Cyndi Lauper, and Berlin."

Mike nodded. "I'll call Dustin right now." He went downstairs to the phone, picking it up to dial Dustin's house's number, his mother calling out from the living room.

"Michael? What are you doing?"

"Just calling Dustin, Mom!"

Mrs. Henderson picked up on the third ring. "Hello?"

"Hi, Mrs. Henderson, is Dustin home? It's Mike."

"Oh, hello, sweetie! It's wonderful to hear from you! Dusty, your friend is on the phone!"

A moment later, Dustin was on the line. "Hello?"

"Hey, it's Mike, I need to ask you a favour."

"What is it?"

"Could I borrow one of your Cyndi Lauper tapes? Also do you still have Berlin? The one with the song from Top Gun?"

Mike couldn't see him, but he could imagine Dustin looking at the phone with his trademark What The Actual Fuck? expression. "...for what, exactly?"

"I'm making a mixtape."

While Mike was on the phone with Dustin, Nancy went out to her car to look through her own tapes, finding Richard Marx. That still left Prince and Chris de Burgh, though, so Mike figured he'd go next door to ask Lucas.

Unfortunately, Erica was the one who answered the door, grumbling when she saw him.

"What do *you* want?"

Mike sighed inwardly. Erica was always a little annoying to deal with but today was really not the day. He needed to have this mixtape done before Christmas. "Is your brother home? I need to talk to him."

Erica rolled her eyes and stomped farther into the house, near the stairs. "Lucas! One of your nerd friends is here!"

From deep inside the house came Lucas' voice, faint, but still audible to Mike at the front door. "Can you *not*, Erica?"

A minute later, Lucas appeared, shoos his sister away. "What's up?"

"You wouldn't happen to have a Prince tape with Purple Rain on it, would you?"

Lucas gave him a weird look. "Yeah, why...?"

Mike groaned. "I'm making a mixtape, okay?"

Lucas narrowed his eyes. "And it's totally not for El, right?"

"Absolutely not," said Mike sarcastically. Lucas stared. "Of course it is, dickhead! Now can I borrow it or not?"

For Chris de Burgh, Mike ended up having to go to the record store, but he worked out a deal with Mr. Keane so that he wouldn't actually have to buy the tape. Mr. Keane agreed to let Mike record just the one song once he explained the situation.

By Christmas Eve, the mixtape was ready, and Mike had already planned everything out. In the morning, after opening some presents and while Holly and his parents went off to Mass, Mike would get El down to the basement where he had cleared enough space for dancing. Then he would put the tape in and ask her to dance. When the tape was over, he would ask the question.

Will you marry me?

He shivered. God, this was really it, wasn't it? He hoped his voice wouldn't sound too weird and awkward on recording because that would surely ruin the mood, but Mike couldn't let himself think about that. It was dinner time anyway.

At dinner, Ted made things very nice and awkward by bringing up the fact that one of Mike's high school classmates and neighbour on the block had just recently gotten married, and shouldn't he be thinking about it too? He was getting to that age, after all. Mike choked on his water, spitting it everywhere.

Holly stared at him in alarm from across the table and he glared as he wiped his face. He pretended not to notice his girlfriend observing the exchange, but of course that wouldn't deter her.

Is everything okay?

I'm fine. There's nothing to worry about.

Okay...

Holly and Mike attempted to salvage the conversation, turning to different topics because if they didn't it was more likely than not that Mike would say something to give himself away, and that would completely ruin the surprise.

On the morning of, the couple were rudely awoken at 7 am by Holly, who ran down the hall and smashed her brother's door open in excitement. "Wake up! Guys, get up! It's Christmas!" She sprinted back to her room as soon as she received confirmation that she had, in fact, woken them.

Mike opened his eyes to find El already staring at him. "Merry Christmas, Mike," she said, smiling. He gulped. *Today's the day.*

"Merry Christmas, El," he answered, offering a weak grin in return. She furrowed her brows.

"You're acting weird."

SHIT. "What do you mean?"

She sighed. "I mean, when your dad brought up Tammy last night you choked and Holly looked at you weirdly and then you guys avoided the subject. And now you're really pale and you look like you're about to puke."

Mike sat up so he could avoid her gaze and shrugged. "I'm always pale."

She huffed behind him. "Yeah, but not *this* pale, Michael. Friends don't lie, and neither do boyfriends."

"I'm not lying!" He exclaimed indignantly, turning to look at her.

"Well, there's clearly something you're not telling me!" She spoke sharply, glaring. She could feel that he was nervous, because it was so strong that he was unwittingly projecting it. "If there's one thing you and I don't do, it's keep secrets." Her shoulders dropped. "Is this-is this about getting married? Like your dad said last night?"

She was looking away from him now, at the window. Mike laid a hand on her knee. "Hey, no, this isn't about that. I'm just- there's a part of your present that I'm gonna give you later and I'm kinda nervous about whether you'll like it or not."

El turned her head and eyed him suspiciously. He could tell she didn't entirely believe him, but she couldn't think of another reason. "You know I'll love whatever you give me."

He nodded, sighing. "I know, it's just... you'll see."

With that, he stood and started to get dressed. During their small argument, Holly had managed to wake the rest of the house, which was just her parents since Nancy was staying with Jonathan. After Mike came out of the bathroom and let El in, Holly cornered him at the top of the stairs.

"Are you ready, Mikey?"

He took a deep breath. "Ready as I'll ever be. She already knows something's up, she noticed me being weird. So now I can't chicken out even if I wanted to, like I did when I wanted to ask her out the first time," he said. Suddenly a thought occurred to him. "Hey," he said, poking his sister's shoulder as they entered the kitchen, "you know you're kinda the reason I even asked her out the day I did?"

She turned to him, wide-eyed. "Really?"

He laughed. "Yeah, you were like five, I think? You asked me when she was gonna be my princess and I said maybe that day and you got so excited you told Mom," he answered, pulling out some Eggos from the freezer. "I probably would've chickened out again, just like I had every other time I'd tried to ask her, except I kept thinking of my cute baby sister Holly sitting in kindergarten thinking El was gonna be my princess that day and so I had to do it."

Holly's face was scrunched up, as if she was trying to conjure something in her mind that she couldn't exactly remember. "I feel like I remember doing that... did you spit milk everywhere or was that another time?"

Smiling, he put two waffles in the toaster. He could hear their mother coming in their direction. "There was more than one time that I spit milk everywhere but I did do it that time, too."

Holly opened her mouth to answer but her brother rounded on her quickly. "Except you can't tell Mom this time!"

She scowled. "I'm not five, Mike."

"Good." After a bit of silence in which Holly puttered around putting out milk and Karen came downstairs with a greeting, he leaned over the toaster. "Why isn't this thing popping, they should be done..." At that moment the waffles popped out and hit him in the face, burning him. "SHIT!"

"Language!"

Once Karen, Ted, and Holly had left for Mass (and they would be gone a while because they were also going to the church's Christmas luncheon), Mike and El were left in the living room picking up the littered pieces of wrapping paper that Holly had left.

"Stop giving me that look, El."

The tree rustled, dropping more needles onto the carpet. "What look? You're not even looking at me right now."

"That *look*. The one you give people when you want something."

She scoffed. "I am not."

He rolled his eyes. "You know what, fine. Leave this mess for later, you're going downstairs."

"I'm going? What about you?"

"I have to get something from my room, just go sit on the couch or something." He lightly shoved her towards the basement door, watching to make sure she actually went down before running upstairs two steps at a time.

When he came back down, it was with a cassette tape in his hand. Her eyes widened. "Did you make me a mixtape? That is so high school, Mike!"

His face burned, eyes dropping to his feet. Was his plan already going to shit so early? "We don't have to listen if you don't... want to..."

"No! It's cute, I want to hear it," she protested, walking closer.

Mike covered the label so she wouldn't see what was written on it. "Okay, lemme just put it in then." Walking over to the boombox in the corner (yes, he had a *boombox*), he steeled himself. *This is it, Wheeler*. He put the tape in.

Mike turned around with a smile on his face and a hand extended. "Do you wanna dance?" He asked as the opening of Every Breath You Take filled the basement.

Her grin stretched her face. "I will if we figure it out together," she answered, taking the hand proffered to her and putting it on her waist. "God, you're so cute. We danced to this at the Snow Ball."

"Yup. That's why I put it on here, and why it's first. It was our first dance together."

"Mmm." She laid her head against his chest as they swayed.

When the second song started, she looked back up at him with a start. "This is the one we danced to in the cabin that time! When Hopper walked in, remember?"

Mike chuckled. "Well, you did look wonderful that night. You always do."

"Was it Valentine's Day?"

He shrugged a little bit. "I think so. That's not the point, anyway. It's just a song we danced to, you know?"

"I swear to god, Mike, if this gets any cheesier I might cry."

"There's about an hour of songs, hah," he answered.

The third song passed without incident, just leaving El thinking about when they'd danced to it. It had been another random day that Mike had been at the cabin, except Hopper hadn't unexpectedly walked in, he'd been there the entire time (just not paying attention).

Upon the start of the fourth, El let out a laugh. "I remember Dustin got so mad at us!"

Dustin had been *obsessed* with Top Gun when it came out and none of the party could fathom why, not even Max. It had just become fact. Then one day, Mike and El decided to try something they thought might break Dustin out of it.

The group was at Dustin's house because the Wheelers' basement was being occupied by setup for Holly's birthday and Lucas wouldn't have been able to get Erica to leave them alone, so Dustin's it was since Will's might get a little overcrowded. Dustin had made the decision to be obnoxious and put on the tape he'd bought that held the famous single Take My Breath Away.

When it got to that song, Mike had pulled El up off the floor and started dancing with her, even kissing her when Dustin came into sight. The other boy had been so disgusted that he had refused to play the song or anything related to Top Gun in their presence ever again. It had been a good day.

The fifth El remembered as their first high school dance. Hawkins High didn't have a Snow Ball, but they did host homecoming and a winter formal. The party hadn't gone to homecoming because Lucas had gotten sick and no one wanted to go if their group was missing a

member, so it was at the winter formal in December that she had heard True Colours for the first time. She'd thought it was a beautiful song at the time, but hearing it now made her nostalgic for her high school days and the innocent start of hers and Mike's relationship.

The next song was Lady In Red, which she distinctly remembered. It had played at homecoming in junior year, and it had always been marked in Mike's mind because she had worn a red dress and she just looked *so beautiful*. It was one of his best memories from high school, if he was to be honest.

When With Or Without You began, El let out a small "Oh." They'd never really danced to this one, but it reminded her of when they'd first said "I love you" to each other. It had played in the car before and after the most amazing concert of her life, where she had accidentally screamed that she loved her boyfriend. It was okay though, because no one else was really paying attention. El had forgotten what she'd said to him on the way home, but Mike hadn't. To quote: "This is one of our songs now, you hear? When you propose you better include it." So he did, and here it was.

He hadn't realized El was crying until he had to let go of her to go flip the tape to its B side. He quickly returned and gathered her up in his arms again, but then the next song started and she pulled back to smack him with a groan, speaking in a watery voice. "You're such a cheeseball, I swear," she sniffed, "That and this are like, my two favourite songs ever."

Purple Rain was their Prom Song, as the pair had dubbed it. Of course, there had been many more songs played at their senior prom that they'd danced to, but Purple Rain was the only one they really remembered. Someone had somehow gotten the strobe lights to all turn a deep purple just for the song, and El had thought it was cute. It was this song and also dancing in plain view of the yearbook photographer (among other things, such as his iconic way of asking her to prom in the first place) that had gotten them the nomination of *Most Likely To Get Married Within 5 Years*. Mike thought about it for a moment, realizing that if she said yes their superlative would actually be correct.

The next song was one she didn't particularly remember, so she asked

Mike why it was on the tape. Every other song had had some kind of sentimental value to it, so why wasn't she seeing it for this one?

"We danced to this at my cousin's wedding in August, remember?" He said.

"Not really."

He sighed. "I'll explain why when this is over, you'll see."

"Okay."

It was the song they'd been dancing to when Mike had been hit by the realization that he absolutely wanted and needed to marry her. They went back to quietly swaying for about another thirty seconds before El spoke again. "My feet hurt."

Mike smiled and pressed a kiss to her hair, hugging her closer. "Only two more to go, my love."

"Oh god," she said, laughing at the start of Right Here Waiting. "I can't even use words to describe how much I want to slap you and kiss you at the same time, it's infuriating."

"I waited, though! 353 whole days! And come on, this one was on when we first moved into the apartment, remember? Dancing around in the middle of a bunch of boxes we could knock over at any second?"

El smiled at the memory. "That was such a good day."

The next and final song was one that was more recent. "You did *not*," she said, grinning.

Mike grinned back down at her. "Obviously I did, it's playing. Plus it's true, I will always love you."

"I'll always love you too, you wastoid." She leaned forward and he down, their lips meeting in the middle for a sweet moment before pulling back and looking into each other's eyes. When she put her head back on his chest and closed her eyes, he gulped. Whitney's voice was getting higher which meant the song wasn't far from

ending and the scariest part of this whole endeavour was just about to arrive.

I Will Always Love You ended but the tape didn't click off, so El knew there was still something coming. But Mike said there were only two songs left...? Suddenly, his voice came over the speakers.

"Hi El, it's Mike. Wait that's dumb of course it's me. Um, anyway, I really hope you liked this mixtape, I planned it out last minute with help from my lovely sisters, then borrowed some tapes from our resident Bard and Ranger to record for it. I've never made a mixtape before so I hope it's not shitty but I did ask Will before I started so it's probably fine? I mean I guess I should listen to it before actually playing it for you but I'm probably gonna forget so I hope it's not too much of a fuckup. Anyway, there's one more surprise for you. I want you to come over here and when I'm done talking too much and the tape ends, read the title I gave it. It's very important. Okay, I think I've been talking way too long so just remember that whatever happens from here, I promise I'll never stop loving you. Merry Christmas, El!"

The tape clicked off and El walked over to the boombox, curious as to what the title of this mixtape could be. Mike is The Cheesiest Boyfriend Ever? Unlikely, but that didn't make it any less true. Behind her, said boyfriend was starting to sweat bullets, his hands fumbling in his pockets trying to find the box. At last, he had it in a vice grip. Pulling it out and opening it while getting down on one knee without attracting attention to himself proved to be difficult, but he guessed he'd had a good idea in giving El the mystery of the mixtape's title because she seemed not to notice what he was doing.

Pressing the open button on the boombox and removing the tape, El looked it over. She could only make out one word: Will. Will? Had Mike written the wrong title on the wrong tape?

"The only thing I can read is will, the rest is chicken scratch as us-" Her breathing stopped and her eyes widened as her heart began to race. Behind her, Mike was on one knee and holding out a little box with a ring in it. She looked back at the tape, then back at Mike.

He cleared his throat. "It, um- it says, will you marry me?"

She felt like she was about to faint. Her throat had dried up; she couldn't speak. Mike looked like he was taking her silence badly, his expression wilting, until he saw her violently nod.

"You will? That's a yes?"

She threw herself at him as he got up, peppering his face with kisses to show what she couldn't say. He smiled, taking the ring out and slipping it carefully onto her finger.

Her voice returned abruptly. "YES!" El reached up, taking Mike's face in her hands and dragging it to her own, kissing him with so much emotion he could almost feel his mouth bruising from the force of it.

Stepping back from her, he grinned devilishly. "Let's take this upstairs, yeah?"

Forty-five minutes later, they lay in Mike's old bed, lazily tracing patterns on each other's skin. El kept looking at the ring newly adorning her finger, admiring its uniqueness. Most engagement rings she'd seen previously had been diamonds or similar, but this one was a completely different kind of rock. It wasn't sparkly, as she'd always imagined, but she found that she loved it all the same.

Probably because of the man who'd given it to her.

A new thought occurred to her. "You didn't give me a speech."

Mike looked at her, blinking sleepily for a second before refocusing. "What?"

"You know, like in movies and books and shit. Whenever the guy proposes he always has some speech about how much he loves her and how she's the light of his life and do him the honour of becoming his wife, blah blah. You know what I'm talking about."

He looked at the ceiling, then back at her. "Are you gonna take back that yes because I didn't give you a speech?"

"This is the one yes I would never take back."

Mike chuckled. "I had one. I just forgot it completely as soon as you turned around. Honestly though," he added, turning on his side, "there's not really any words that can accurately describe how I feel about you, so I think it's not a big loss."

She scrunched her nose. "You're right."

"Usually."

"Shut up, dipshit."

"But I'm your dipshit."

"Really and truly now."

Mike sighed. "Oh, I've always been."

"My dipshit?"

"Your dipshit, wastoid, dumbass, all that good wholesome stuff."

"Boyfriend."

He hummed in assent. "That too."

"And now I get to call you my fiancé."

A lazy smile made its way across his face. "That sounds nice."

"And then it'll be husband."

"Even nicer."

She wrapped her arms around his free one that was next to her. "But you know what you'll always be, that never changes?"

"What?"

"My Mike."

"That's the best one."

this is the ring, it's made of zoisite so that's why that was the chapter title: k this link also didn't post properly, if you search "zoisite ring" on google images it should be the ninth image to pop up

alright, it's a wrap! it has been a fuckin while, my dudes. i started this in may, and i think that through these past 8 months my writing has evolved a lot. it's all been thanks to the unending support and motivation you guys give me, so i'd like to thank everyone who comments and also those who just read because you guys are important too. thank you all so much, and i hope you stick around because this is NOT the end of my writing :D

come join me on tumblr bc i will be posting progress updates for my new stuff there,, also it's easier to interact and answer any questions on there than it is in comment sections lol